

# THE YOUNG HOMESTEADERS



By J.W. LINCOLN





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# THE YOUNG HOMESTEADERS

A STORY OF HOW TWO BOYS  
MADE A HOME IN THE WEST

BY  
J. W. LINCOLN

Illustrated by  
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THE YOUNG HOMESTEADERS

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## FOREWORD

**T**HE YOUNG HOMESTEADERS is really a chapter from the lives of two keen American boys who go West to make a home for their mother.

Ignorant of the hardships and conditions of frontier life, Phil and Ted Porter meet them manfully. They face their difficulties with a smile, work like Trojans on their quarter section, and, through the love which they bear their mother, evidenced in their every act, they win the respect of the kind-hearted but rough settlers who help them build an irrigation plant and prepare their fields.

The people with whom they come in contact are intensely human; people who do things, to whom setbacks and obstacles are matters of daily occurrence, developing ingenuity in surmounting them and a sturdy self-reliance.

Many a heartache, many a thrilling experience on a trip up the Great Lakes and with bears, thieves, and fighting forest fires do Phil

and Ted have before they finally wrest success from the wild land; yet they are not impossible book heroes. They do nothing that any wide-awake American boy with grit and belief in himself could not do.



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# The Young Homesteaders

## CHAPTER I

### SOLVING A PROBLEM

“**P**HIL, what should you and Ted do if you were suddenly called upon to support your sisters and me?” asked Mrs. Porter, as her family were finishing their supper.

“Play ball,” declared Phil.

“Be an aviator,” announced his brother.

“You might have known what their answers would be, Mommy, without asking,” exclaimed Sallie, with disgust. “Ever since Phil was elected captain of his school nine all he can think of is ‘play ball.’”

“Yes, and Ted’s just as absorbed in that old machine he is building — as if he could build anything that would fly,” interposed Margie.

“I tell you it can fly, Miss Smarty. It rose more than a foot from the ground and kept up for its whole length last week,” retorted Ted.

“That wasn’t flying, it was the shock caused



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by my lending you my week's allowance," retaliated Margie.

"You said you wouldn't mention that, and anyway, I didn't promise to pay it back until next month."

"I'm sorry, Ted. That slipped out without my thinking. Do you suppose your machine would fly twice its length if I loaned you this week's money?"

"Goody, sis, will you?"

"Don't you do it, Marg," warned her older sister. "Momsy, you ought to forbid Ted's throwing away all his and Margie's money on that crazy old airship."

"I haven't asked *you* for any, have I?" demanded Ted, his cheeks flushing.

"Good reason why — you know I wouldn't lend you any."

"You can turn up your nose all you like, but you'll change your tune when you see me flying about."

"I shall be so old my eyesight will be gone when you do."

"Never you —" began Ted, only to be interrupted by his mother.

"There, there, son, don't get so excited. It is all right for you to spend your own time and

money on your flying machine, if you wish, but you must not borrow from Margie."

"Now don't scold Ted, Momsy," broke in the younger girl. "I really owe him something because he helped me to pass my algebra exam."

"Besides, I said I would pay her back next month — and I will."

"All right, but I forbid you to ask Margie again. I think, too, it would be just as well if you all saved your allowances from now on — there is no knowing how soon they will stop entirely," added Mrs. Porter, seriously.

At this statement, the boys looked blankly at their sisters, then at their mother, and as they searched her face, they noticed how unusually wan and frail she appeared.

"Why, Momsy, how tired you look!" exclaimed Phil.

"I am, son, — and ill. The doctor says I may," and her voice quavered, "I may be obliged to give up my work and take a long rest."

In shocked surprise, her sons and daughters heard her words, for, though they loved their mother dearly, with the carelessness of youth, they had failed to note the increasing look of weariness that was furrowing her face with lines.

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“If Dr. Blair says you ought to take a rest, you shall,” declared Ted.

“Yet I can’t unless you and Phil are able to take my place as breadwinner, and flying and playing ball do not seem to be very reliable occupations.”

“We didn’t mean that; at least, I didn’t,” protested Phil, hastily.

“Nor I,” his brother quickly confirmed.

“Then what would you do?”

An instant Phil looked at his brother, who nodded, then replied:

“We’d take up a free homestead out West and raise wheat.”

So utterly different from anything they had expected was this announcement that Mrs. Porter and her daughters simply sat in silence.

Confronted with the necessity of bringing up four young children with only a small life insurance as a basis, the mother had courageously set about the task.

Artistic by nature, through the aid of friends, she obtained a responsible and remunerative position with a large department store which had enabled her to make their home in Weston comfortable and attractive, even, indeed, through the strictest economy, to save a few hundred



dollars — but the effort had been at the expense of her strength and health.

“A lot you kids know about farming,” exclaimed Margie, the first to recover from her surprise.

“Or about anything else that’s practical,” retorted Phil. “But we can learn — and there’s a better living to be made from a farm, say out in Washington State, even the first year, than we could provide you in the city in five.”

“You think you would be happy to leave Weston, with your amusements and all your friends?” quietly asked Mrs. Porter.

“We know we should be,” asserted Phil. “Why, Jack Howell told us it took all the money he could earn just to buy his clothes and go round — and he receives twenty dollars a week. So how could we take care of you and the girls, too, even if we were able to get that much?”

“Which we wouldn’t be,” promptly declared Ted. “If a fellow can get ten dollars a week when he starts in, he is lucky. I know, because I’ve been trying to find a place where I could earn some money to put into my flying machine.”

“Why go way out to Washington?” inquired

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Sallie. "If you are set on going in for farming, there must be no end of places nearer where you could do as well."

"If we had the money," returned Phil. "As we haven't, the thing for us to do is to take up some of the land that is given away by the government to settlers, and there is none easier to clear than in Washington. Oh, we know," he added, forestalling the exceptions he knew his sister would take to this statement, "because Ted and I have been looking it up."

"I thought lumber was the chief product of Washington," declared Margie, cocking her head on one side, as though she were obtaining a mental picture of the products of that State as they were printed in her geography.

"So it is, but there are thousands of acres which are particularly adapted to wheat; that is, the climate is, and the soil is fertile," replied Ted.

"But there are bears out in those forests," protested Margie. "Just imagine Phil and Ted at work in their fields when up comes Master Bruin behind them and gives them a swat with his paw, knocking the mighty captain of the Parker School Base Ball Nine out with the first blow. Why —"

"Be sensible, Marg, if you can," snapped Phil.

"Very well. Where do Momsy and Sallie and I fit in your plan? Dr. Blair says Momsy must have a rest. But all I can see in your scheme is a lark for you and Ted while we stay on here in the East."

"We'd have Momsy and Sallie come out just as soon as we had filed our entry to the land and put up a cabin," declared Phil.

"Leaving me to the tender mercies of some orphans' home here?" bantered Margie.

"The bears would get you if you came out there; they like chicken," grinned Ted.

Margie was on the point of retorting, when her mother interposed.

"This is too serious a matter to be turned into a joke, children. I —"

What Mrs. Porter intended to say, however, was left unsaid, at least for the moment, for before she could proceed, the door opened and in burst several young people.

"Hurry and finish your suppers; we want you to go canoeing," exclaimed one of the girls. Then, as she noticed that Mrs. Porter seemed about to refuse, she added: "Now you mustn't say 'no,' Momsy Porter. It's concert night,

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and we can't go unless you let Sallie and Margie and the boys go, mother said so."

"We're going to sow wheat instead," asserted Margie.

"That will do, daughter," rebuked her mother.

"I —"

"You will let them, won't you?" begged another girl.

"Yes. Dr. Blair is coming to talk with me, so I shall not be left alone."

With a swish of skirts the girls swooped upon the frail little woman, almost smothering her with their hugs and kisses, then rushed away, her "be careful!" ringing in their ears as they trooped off, the boys trailing behind, their arms loaded with cushions.



## CHAPTER II

### TEMPTATION

SALLIE'S remark about her brother's absorption in his nine might have been applied with equal truth to every boy in the Parker School. When any of them met, the playing of the team was the one topic of conversation, especially since, under Phil's leadership, there was the possibility of the interscholastic championship coming to Parker School, an honour which had not been attained for almost ten years.

It was but natural, therefore, that, with the captain of the team as their companion, the boys should deluge him with questions, and they did.

"Honestly now, Phil, do you think Parker can beat Mercer Academy?" asked one of them.

"If our pitchers work well, we ought to."

"If our pitchers work well," repeated another, in amazement. "What's the matter with you, Phil? Aren't you the best pitcher in the school league, according to the coaches? Why, you did

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the most of the work last season and you've done all of it, practically, this year. And then you say if our pitchers go well we may win."

"What's up, anyhow?" demanded several of the others, astounded at the words of their captain.

"There's going to be a change in the team," replied Phil, quietly.

This statement elicited a veritable avalanche of comment and questions, but to them all the captain of the team would make no reply except to tell them to wait and see.

This answer was so unsatisfactory, serving as it did only to whet their curiosity the more, that finally Phil broke away from his companions and hurried ahead to join the girls. Yet no sooner had he caught up with them than he wished he had remained behind.

"Hello, Farmer Phil!" cried several of them, as they caught sight of the popular pitcher. "How's crops? What's the latest quotation on wheat?"

For the moment he thought to rebuke his sisters for disclosing the plan which he had intended to keep secret, at least until he should announce it on the morrow to his team-mates.

But Sallie and Margie wisely kept on the side of their companions farthest from him, and so riotous did the badinage become that Phil soon realized that anything he might say would only make the matter worse. Yet the glance he threw at his sisters was eloquent.

“Oh, you needn’t blame Marg or Sallie,” exclaimed one of the others. “I heard part of what you said before I entered the dining-room. So I bullied Marg into supplying the missing links.”

By this time the rest of the fellows had caught up, and the group quickly divided into couples, all of them talking excitedly over the surprising bits of news.

As they proceeded toward the boathouse, Phil was seemingly unconscious that he was walking beside the girl who had sought to appease his wrath against his sisters, and so absorbed was he in his own thoughts that it was not until she spoke that he was aware of her presence.

“I think it is perfectly splendid,” she exclaimed, tenderly.

“What?” demanded Phil, almost savagely.

“Why, your giving up the captaincy of the school team when you are certain to win the championship, just to help your mother.”

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“ Splendid nonsense! I should be worse than a cad if I didn’t.”

“ But you could wait about going out West until after school closes, you know, and then you wouldn’t sacrifice the honour of bringing the championship to Parker.”

“ You mustn’t say such a thing,” returned the boy, in a tense voice, as he heard with revulsion the very idea expressed in cold words which had been persistently surging through his mind.

“ Why not, pray? I am as keen to have Parker land the championship under your captaincy as you are yourself, and what difference would a few weeks — it’s only seven — make to your mother? Besides — ”

“ Don’t, Helen, don’t,” pleaded Phil. “ You know perfectly well how I feel about the team. But what would you, or any one else, think of me if I should let my selfish desire for school honours interfere with my mother’s health? ”

“ Yet it would only be for seven weeks. Besides, Blair simply said she needed a rest, but he didn’t say an immediate rest or — ”

“ It makes no difference if it were only for seven minutes, Helen, I should be ashamed of myself all the rest of my life if I let my own feelings weigh against Momsy’s health. Just



think of all that she has done for us. Do you suppose she has ever thought of herself when anything for our benefit was at stake? It would have been better for her if she only had — I've been a selfish prig not to see before that she was killing herself. Besides, you can be certain she would not have told us that Dr. Blair said she must have a rest if he had not told her a great deal more. So if it is in my power, I am going to do everything I can to make her well and show her that I appreciate all she has put up with for me and the others."

"Spoken like a man, Phil," exclaimed a voice so close to the young people that they jumped in surprise; for so absorbed had they been in their conversation that they had not noticed the tall figure striding along behind them.

"Why, Dr. Blair, how you frightened me!" gasped the girl, confused and angry to think her words urging Phil to put the success of his team above all else had been overheard.

The physician, however, gave no heed to the remark, keeping his eyes fixed upon her companion, as he said:

"I really owe you an apology for playing the eavesdropper, Phil. But just as I caught up with you, I could not but hear Miss Howell's

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pleading, and, as the matter had also occurred to me, I was unable to refrain from listening to your reply. I am on my way to talk with your mother now, and I felt I was justified because your attitude could not but have an important bearing upon my advice to her. What it is that you propose to do I don't know, and it really doesn't matter so long as you intend to do it at once. Your mother has worked till she is on the verge of a breakdown to give you young people a comfortable and happy home. As a matter of fact, I told her this afternoon that if she gave another week to her work I should be able to do nothing for her. So you see your decision not to await the closing of school is most timely."

The words as to the seriousness of his mother's condition were like blows to Phil, and it was several minutes before he felt sufficiently sure of himself to ask:

"W-what is the trouble with Momsy, Dr. Blair?"

"Tuberculosis, and in such a much farther advanced stage than I suspected. With plenty of fresh air and outdoor life, however, I shall be able to check it, I believe. Only she must be spared all worry. Again I wish to tell you that

I am proud to know you appreciate all your mother has done for you."

With a friendly pat on the boy's shoulder, Dr. Blair vanished in the dusk as suddenly as he had appeared, leaving the boy and girl standing, abashed by the words he had spoken.

Impulsively Helen slipped her hand through her companion's arm and drew him after the rest of the canoeing party, as she whispered earnestly:

"Forgive me, Phil."

## CHAPTER III

### ELECTING A CAPTAIN

**I**T was an excited crowd of boys and girls that gathered about the steps of Parker School the next morning, for the news that Phil was going to leave before the end of the term had spread rapidly. Yet, though they waited eagerly for his appearance, that they might hear confirmation or denial from his lips, they were forced to go to their classes unsatisfied, because the boy, realizing their curiosity, purposely kept out of the way until after recitation time, and when he did enter the building, he went directly to the office of the principal instead of to his class-room.

“What’s all this I hear about your deserting the team, Porter?” asked that official, as he motioned Phil to a chair.

“I do not know what you may have heard, Mr. Maxwell, but it is true that I intend to leave school today — and Ted will also.”

“Afraid of the Mercer Academy team?”



sneered the principal, who had felt it keenly that his school had not been able to win the baseball championship and now saw the unusually rosy prospect of accomplishing the feat this season vanish.

A hot flush suffused the boy's face at this taunt, and he arose from his chair.

"You should know me better than that, Mr. Maxwell. It is for no such reason. My mother is in a very serious condition, and Ted and I intend to take the burden of the support of ourselves and our sisters from her shoulders. Will you call a meeting of the team to elect a new captain, or shall I?"

As he scanned the manly face before him, the principal was thoroughly ashamed of his slur.

"I'm sorry to hear about your mother, Phil," he said. "Also, I admire your pluck. Just forget, if you can, my remark about Mercer, but you know I had set my heart on your bringing the interscholastic championship to Parker and it is a keen disappointment to be informed of your leaving."

"But that doesn't mean Parker won't win, Mr. Maxwell. The team is working splendidly and they will probably do better without than with me."

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“I’m afraid not. Somehow, when you were in the box, it not only gave confidence to our boys, but it rattled the opposing team. For what time do you wish me to call the meeting — that is, if you are quite sure you cannot be persuaded to remain in school until the end of the term?”

“That is out of the question, sir.” And then the boy briefly informed the principal of the seriousness of his mother’s condition.

“Have you a position yet?” asked Mr. Maxwell, as Phil finished. “If you have not, I shall be glad to do all I can to assist you. I know several business men and I shall be pleased to give you letters to them.”

“We are going out West to take up a homestead, but I thank you just the same.”

“Well, well, we shall not even be able to have your services as coach for Parker, shall we? That’s too bad. I had hoped we might, at least, arrange to have you do some coaching. H’m, going to take up a homestead, eh? You’ll have pretty tough ‘sledding,’ as they say, I’m afraid.”

“No more so than in any other work, and, besides, my mother will be able to be out-of-doors.”

“Is she going with you?”

“No, Ted and I are going alone. After we have filed our claim and put up our cabin, we shall send for her and the girls.”

“I’m afraid you will have some difficulty about filing your entry, as they call filing a claim, in the Land Office. I know something about it because my father was an ‘entryman.’”

“But why do you think so, sir?”

“Because you are neither of age nor the head of a family, and minors are not allowed to make an entry unless they have done service in the army or navy.”

“But widows can file a claim, and Ted and I shall select the homestead, build a cabin, then send for Momsy and she will make the entry.”

“Clever way of getting around it, Phil, very — that is, if the government will allow minors to act as settlers. How about that?”

“We do not know yet, but Dr. Blair will write to Washington about it and he thinks he can arrange it.”

“Probably he can. If you have any difficulty, however, just ask your mother to let me know and I will do all I can to help her and you. And now, when do you wish me to call the team together — after school?”

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“ I rather thought, if you don’t mind, sir, that I should like to speak to the fellows, but our time is so short that I must go right home to pack.”

“ Then I’ll have the team go to the gymnasium directly. It won’t interfere with classes very much, for I don’t imagine, in view of the excitement about your resigning, that recitations are going very well.”

And rising from his desk, Mr. Maxwell went to the various rooms, summoning the members of the team and substitutes, while Phil went directly to the meeting place.

As he looked about the gymnasium, whose walls were decorated with the various trophies won by members of Parker School during its fifteen years of existence, a lump rose in his throat. For he had often gazed upon them before and had hoped that he should be able to place upon its walls the most coveted emblem of all, the pennant betokening the baseball championship of the interscholastic league.

Going over to the spot where were the footballs, with the scores of the games in which they had been used marked upon them, he was fondly fingering one bearing the legend Parker 12 — Mercer 6, 1910, a victory in which his work at



fullback had played no mean part, when there was a patter of footsteps and in rushed a group of excited, eager boys.

For the moment, as they beheld Phil standing before the footballs, they were hushed. Then, as they began to sense his feelings, one of them shouted:

“Three cheers for good old Phil!”

Lustily they were given, and they were about to be repeated when another group of boys entered and began to groan and catcall.

“Stop that — instantly,” rang out the stern voice of the principal, who was close upon their heels, unbeknown to the boys.

But though the hoots were silenced, those who had uttered them kept up a continual growling and grumbling among themselves, even after Mr. Maxwell had mounted the instructor’s platform, at one end of the gymnasium, and rapped for order.

“I have called you together to listen to me, not to listen to you,” exclaimed the principal. “If I hear any more derisive words, I shall suspend the utterer from the team for the remainder of the term. Undoubtedly, from the reports that have come to me from the classrooms as to the hopelessness of your recitations,

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you have heard the rumour that Phil Porter intended to resign from Parker School. I am only too sorry to say that it is true. I — ”

“ Quitter! He’s afraid of Mercer!” burst from different parts of the room.

“ Jenkins, you and Whitten leave the gymnasium, and after school bring your uniforms to me. We will now proceed to elect a captain to take Phil’s place. Hawley, I appoint you to gather the votes.”

Abashed at the drastic punishment meted out to the two of their number who had expressed their opinions, the other members of the team searched for paper and pencils, then divided into groups, discussing the best candidates.

While they were thus absorbed, Phil approached Mr. Maxwell.

“ I know it is none of my business, sir, but won’t you lift your ban from Jenkins and Whitten? Just because they do not like me is no reason why Parker should be made to suffer from their loss.”

No answer did the principal make to the boy’s request, and he turned away, sick at heart to think that the team had been still further crippled on his account.

But when young Hawley quietly walked up

to the platform and handed his hat containing the votes to Mr. Maxwell, the master exclaimed:

“Phil has importuned me to revoke my suspension of Jenkins and Whitten so that Parker shall not be weakened any more. While you all know that I am not in the habit of changing my mind, as Phil is going out West and on a particularly praiseworthy purpose, I shall yield to his wish. Hawley, fetch Jenkins and Whitten back.”

Ere the words had left the principal's mouth, hearty cheers for their old captain rang through the room, punctuated by cries of “Speech! Speech!”

With a smile Mr. Maxwell nodded to Phil, and the boy walked to the platform, then turned and faced his former team-mates.

“I'm sorry that I must resign, fellows, but I must, so there's no use talking about it. We have the best nine at Parker that we have had for years, and if you all give your new captain the same kind of support you have given me, there is no reason why the pennant should not hang on the wall of this gym.”

Again cheers rang through the room, and as they subsided Mr. Maxwell announced:

“The voting has resulted as follows: Sydney

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Thomas, 14; Bertram Peters, 7; Jenkins, 1. Thomas is, therefore, elected captain to succeed Porter."

"Good boy, Syd!" cried his friends, gathering around him, excitedly. But Thomas broke from them and walked to where Phil stood.

"Whatever I know about baseball I have learned from Phil, and for his sake I want you all to work hard with me to bring the pennant to Parker," he exclaimed.

When the cheers subsided, the former captain said:

"I only wish I had taught Syd. There is no need to tell you fellows that it is hard to leave my — I mean the — team. But Syd knows more inside baseball than I do, and he can lead you to the championship, as I said before, if you will only give him the support you have given me. Though I shall be far away, I want some of you to write to me and tell me how things are going, but if you don't win the pennant, you needn't expect to receive any replies from me. If I can get out to practise this afternoon, I shall, but as I start in the morning, I haven't much time to get ready. And now, just to please me, let's cheer old Parker and Syd."

Willing was the response to this request, but



instead of cheering their new captain, the boys shouted for their old one, surging about him and wringing his hands; even Jenkins and Whitten, who had returned, speaking with him, grateful for his intervention in their behalf.

## CHAPTER IV

### A PLEASANT SURPRISE

**A**S Phil and Ted, laden with packages and bags, came in sight of the station on the following morning, they gasped in amazement.

Every member of Parker School seemed to be there, and when the boys and girls beheld their two popular schoolmates, they rushed for them in a body, surrounding and cheering them, while the members of the baseball team seized the luggage from their hands, escorting them in triumph to the station.

“Look out for the bears! Hope your crops are bumpers! Show ’em what a tenderfoot can do!” were among the comments and bits of advice with which Phil and Ted were deluged as their friends crowded about and grasped their hands.

“Here, come back with those bags! No tricks with them,” called Ted, anxiously, as he noticed that he and his brother were being sepa-

rated from their belongings by those who were eager to bid them godspeed.

So dense was the throng about the boys, however, that the behest could not be obeyed, and they seemed in imminent danger either of being forced to start without their luggage or of being compelled to miss the train.

But as the locomotive whistled for the station, the crowd fell back, cheering and shouting their good-byes, while those with the bags and other things closed in, rushing into the train with them.

As the bell clanged its signal for departure, there was a hurried leave-taking by members of the team, then the ball players scrambled from the car, and as Phil and Ted appeared on the rear platform, waving their hats, the boys and girls about the station gave three lusty cheers and then burst into singing "For he's a jolly good fellow."

Until they could no longer see or hear their former schoolmates, the boys stood on the platform. When at last they turned and entered the car, they took their seats in silence, each too deeply moved to trust himself to speak.

"It's a good thing Momsy and the girls said good-bye to us at home," observed Phil, after

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a few minutes. "They couldn't have put a word in edgewise."

"I suppose so; still, I'd like to have seen Momsy again," returned Ted, his voice quavering.

In reply, Phil struck his brother a resounding clap on the back.

"Buck up, son, buck up!" he exclaimed, his own voice none too steady. "Just remember that we are going to make a home for her where she can grow strong and happy, and forget about the leave-taking."

For a moment it seemed, to those seated near by, uncertain whether or not the boy could master his emotion. But, squaring his shoulders, he asserted his will power, and in the most matter of fact tone he could muster said:

"I wonder whether it would be better to seed down to durum wheat this season or put everything we clear into alfalfa?"

The other passengers in the car had noted the demonstration at the Weston station, and from various remarks, capped by Phil's admonition, had guessed correctly that the two boys were leaving home to begin their battle with the world. Many an eye among them grew



moist as their minds harked back to the days when they too had stepped from the protection of home into the struggle of real life, and keen therefore was their interest in Ted's ability to meet the crisis.

Accordingly, as they heard his statement in regard to the wheat, there was a murmur of hearty approval which caused the younger boy to gaze about him in surprise, but, though his brother had heard it also, he wished to keep Ted to the mark and asked:

"What in the world is 'durum' wheat?"

"There, I knew you didn't read that last pamphlet we received from the Department of Agriculture," gloated his brother. "If you had, you would not have been obliged to ask. Durum wheat is a particularly hardy and quick-growing kind which may be planted in the spring and reaped in the summer."

"Well, it will be long past spring by the time we get our land cleared and in condition to plant," smiled Phil, "so I guess we'll sow to alfalfa."

"But I want to put in a little durum, anyway," declared Ted, "just to see what it will do, you know."

"All right, son, you shall, but just now you'd

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better be picking up some of these bags and parcels or we shall be hauled out onto a side track before we can leave the car."

Many were the offers from other passengers to assist the boys in carrying their luggage, but they declined them courteously and, in due course, left the train.

"Why, there are Momsy and the girls!" cried Ted, in delight, as they walked up the long platform of the terminal station, in Boston. "How on earth did they get here?"

Neither of the two, however, stopped to discuss the matter, each making all possible haste to join them.

"Dr. Blair drove us in his automobile," declared Margie, as her brother came up. "I think he is just perfectly grand. He's going to —"

"Careful, daughter! Dr. Blair wishes it to be a surprise, you know," admonished Mrs. Porter.

Flushing, Margie seized some of her younger brother's parcels, while he led her on ahead that he might extract from her the information which he could see she was too excited to keep secret for long.

Again Mrs. Porter frustrated Ted's plan.

"Dr. Blair wishes us to wait for him on a bench in the old station," she announced.

"This seems to be a 'Blair-conducted' excursion," smiled Phil, as the luggage was set down and Mrs. Porter and the girls took seats. "Is he going to drive you in his car ahead of our train all the way to Chelan County?"

"I wish that he were," returned his mother, earnestly.

"Well, I'm mighty glad he brought you this far," asserted the boy, emphatically.

"You must have broken some speed limits, though, to get here ahead of us," opined Ted.

"We didn't," declared Margie. "We were on our way long before the train left Weston."

"Then his bringing you in was all planned out?"

"Of course, silly," exclaimed Sallie. "You don't suppose Momsy would have been content to keep away from the station unless she knew she would see you again, do you?"

"Well, you needn't act so superior," retorted the boy. "If you had the safety of seven hundred dollars and all the responsibility of selecting a suitable homestead on your mind, you might not think of everything."

"Poor little mind! Come over to the soda

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fountain and I'll buy an egg-chocolate to brace it up."

"You're on! Come along, Momsy, Marg, Phil. Sallie's going to spend sixty cents of her own money," grinned Ted.

"Egg-chocolates are fifteen cents apiece, and five times fifteen are seventy-five, instead of sixty, Teddy boy," asserted Margie. "I don't wonder your old machine wouldn't fly if you can't make your calculations any better than that."

"Now don't get too puffed up because you can multiply fifteen by five. I said sixty cents because Sallie won't buy herself a drink, wouldn't if she never had any," chuckled Ted, his sister's anger at this flaunting of her "closeness" repaying him for her gibe of the moment before.

"Wait till we get our tickets and then I'll treat," announced Phil, taking his brother's arm and heading him toward the long row of ticket windows.

In dismay, Mrs. Porter looked from the boys to her daughters.

"There's — there's no hurry about the tickets, is there?" she stammered. "How long before the train goes, Phil?"



“Two hours, Momsy.”

“Then there is plenty of time, I am sure.”

“But we might as well get them now and then we shall not be obliged to bother about them later. Besides, it is so early that we ought to be able to get the best berths. Come on, Ted.”

Again Mrs. Porter and her daughters exchanged swift and significant glances.

“Oh, bother the tickets! Come, have the egg-chocolates first,” exclaimed Sallie. “I’m just going to fool you, Ted, so you’d better come and watch me buy a soda for myself.”

“First and last time,” chuckled the boy. “Come on, Phil, we can’t afford to miss seeing a modern miracle.”

Their mother, who was fervently hoping that Dr. Blair would arrive ere her family should return from the soda-water fountain, pleaded the necessity of guarding the luggage as an excuse for not accompanying them. The boys, however, would not listen to her refusal, and, after a hesitation which ended only when she beheld the doctor entering the waiting-room, she consented.

“Haven’t bought your tickets yet, I hope,” said a cheery voice behind the young people as they stood in front of the soda-water counter.

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"They haven't, Dr. Blair, but Sallie and I have been obliged to stand all sorts of abuse to keep them from doing so," laughed Margie.

"Never mind, I'll try to atone for it. You see, I didn't want you to tell my plan until I knew it could be accomplished. Phil, how would you and Ted like to take the trip up the Great Lakes from Buffalo to Duluth on an ore boat?"

"Great! Fine! If we only could!" exclaimed the boys; while Ted added:

"And boat rates are cheaper than rail."

"Who's stingy now?" cried Sallie, amid the laughter her brother's words had evoked.

"I was thinking the saving would mean about twenty more acres for us," retorted Ted, flushing.

"That's right, son. You must figure to save every possible cent," smiled the physician. "However, thanks to my friend Bronson, who has an interest in one of the ore fleets, you are both to be his guests for the trip, so that you will save enough for a good many acres. Here's the letter to Captain Perkins, of the Admiral, which will serve as tickets."

"And it won't cost us a cent?" asked Ted.

"Not a penny."

"Hooray for you and Mr. Bronson!" cried

the lad, dancing about in sheer joy, while the others expressed their gratitude less boisterously.

“ I’ll go with you while you buy your tickets, if you don’t mind,” observed the physician, and as the three reached one of the windows, Dr. Blair stopped, saying: “ I must tell you there is a strike on against the ore boats. Don’t mention it to your mother, it might worry her. Mr. Bronson, however, said there was really no danger; you must just be careful going aboard and leaving the boat. You might be mistaken for strike-breakers, you know. Of course, if you think the risk is too great — ”

“ It will only add to the fun,” interrupted Ted, and his brother agreed with him.

## CHAPTER V

### TIMELY ASSISTANCE

“**W**E shall not be obliged to leave until afternoon so long as we are only going to Buffalo,” announced Phil, as they rejoined their mother and sisters.

“Yes, and Dr. Blair wishes us all to be his guests until we do start,” supplemented Ted, joyously.

“Now please don’t refuse, Mrs. Porter,” exclaimed the kindly physician. “I wish to keep your mind from the boys’ departure as much as possible. Just remember that it will be only a few weeks before they send for you. It will make it easier if you have something to distract your thoughts during the day, you know.”

Quickly the boys checked their luggage, and soon they all were whirling uptown in Dr. Blair’s big touring car.

“By the way,” said he, as they entered the business district, “how are you boys carrying your money?”



“Six one-hundred-dollar bills and the other hundred in tens and fives,” promptly responded Ted.

“So you are the treasurer, eh?”

“Yes; we reasoned, as I am the smaller and younger, that people would think that I would be less likely to have it and therefore it would be safer.”

“Not a bad idea, but I have a better one. We will just go into this bank here and get a letter of credit;” and quickly the physician brought his machine to a stop at the curb.

“But what shall we do for travelling money?” protested Phil.

“You can get the letter of credit for six hundred and seventy-five dollars. The remainder, with what you have left from your ticket money, will be really more than you will need until you arrive at Duluth. When you are there, you can go to a bank and draw enough money against your letter to pay your fare to Chikau.”

“You really think we had better?” asked Ted, ruefully, for he felt a pride in carrying the money which was to start them on the road to fortune.

“I certainly do,” declared Dr. Blair; then added, with a smile, “You can carry the letter

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of credit, which is practically the same as the money, only in a much safer form. You see, if you should lose or be robbed of the money, it would be gone for good, and you know how serious such a loss would be. On the other hand, if you should lose or be robbed of the letter, you would simply notify the bank to that effect and the money would still be safe."

"But how could we get it?" inquired Phil.

"The bank here in Boston would issue a new letter, at the same time sending a warning throughout the country not to honour the one you had lost."

Quickly the two brothers exchanged glances, and, as they were of agreement, Ted said:

"All right, Dr. Blair. We'll get a letter of credit if you will tell us how to do it."

"It is really very simple. You give your money to the clerk who issues the letters, and he returns to you a letter stating that his bank holds a certain amount of money, in your case it will be six hundred and seventy-five dollars, to your credit against which you are authorized to draw. You then sign the letter and also the signature book, at the bank, for proper identification. When you wish any money, you go to a reputable bank or trust company, show

your letter, and state the amount you desire, signing your application, which practically amounts to a draft. This will be compared with your signature on the letter, and as it will correspond, the money will be paid you, while the clerk will deduct the amount on the letter, with the date and the name of his institution, the remainder being the amount you are still entitled to draw. When your last dollar is drawn, the institution paying it will keep the letter and then notify the bank in Boston."

The purchase of the letter was soon accomplished, Dr. Blair insisting upon paying the small fee charged, on the ground that he had suggested the idea, and the rest of the day until train time passed all too quickly for those who were to be left at home, though Mrs. Porter and the girls were happy in the few additional hours the change in plans had enabled them to enjoy with Phil and Ted.

When the train stopped at the Buffalo station early the next morning, the two boys quickly alighted. To their dismay, there were only three men on the platform who were not busy about the cars.

"Which way do you suppose we go?" asked Ted.

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“ We’ll find out from some of those men,” replied his brother, walking toward the group of three men, who had been watching the boys closely ever since they stepped upon the platform, and talking earnestly among themselves, in evident disagreement.

“ Will you kindly tell us how we get to the Waterfront Dock? ” asked Phil, as they came up to them.

Instantly the men exchanged significant glances, while one of them exclaimed gruffly:

“ What do you want to go there for? ”

“ We are going aboard the ore boat Admiral,” replied Ted.

“ Scabs, eh? ” snarled one of the men, looking at his companions with an “ I told you so ” air.

“ We are not! ” declared Phil, emphatically. “ We are going to make the trip to Duluth as the guests of Mr. Bronson, of Boston.”

“ That ’s a pretty good story, but it won’t — ” began one of the men, only to be interrupted by another, as, with an expressive wink at his fellows, he said:

“ Sure, we’ll show you how to get there. In fact, we’ll take you there, as we are going that way ourselves. Give us some of your bundles,



we'll help carry them." And he made a grab for Ted's suitcase.

Acting upon this cue, the other men snatched at the luggage Phil had.

Surprised at the suddenness of the move, the boys had been unable to keep hold of several articles, but as they recovered their wits, they clung to those they still had.

"Get a move on; we can't stay here all day," growled one of the men, laying a hand on Ted's shoulder and shoving him toward a flight of steps that led to the street below.

"I—I think we'll have breakfast first," stammered Phil, alarmed at the words and actions of the men. "So just give us back our things, please."

"We'll give them to you when we get good and ready, see? Now come along or we'll make you," snapped the largest of the trio, menacingly.

The boys did not intend to be forced into compliance, however, and quickly placing themselves back to back, made it evident they intended to keep the luggage they still retained.

"What's the use of monkeying with these kids? Why not give it to 'em now?" demanded one of the men.

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Ere his companions could reply or even act, however, there came the sound of several people running toward them.

"The cops! Give it to 'em and then beat it!" growled the ringleader.

Instantly his companions made vicious lunges at the boys, but they, frightened yet alert, dodged cleverly, and their antagonists, growling, dashed for the stairway.

"Drop them bundles!" shouted a voice.

But the three men only increased their speed.

"Drop 'em, or we'll shoot!" snapped the voice again, while another added:

"I know ivery mother's son of yez an' if yez iver show yer faces around here ag'in, I'll run yez in!"

These threats produced the desired effect upon the fugitives, and, pausing in their descent of the steps, they hurled back the packages, then resumed their flight.

So anxious about recovering their luggage had the boys been that not until they saw the packages lying torn and untied on the platform did they look at the men whose arrival had been so opportune, and their surprise was no less when they beheld three stalwart policemen, one with a revolver in his hand.

"'T is a close shave yez had," smiled one of them, while another growled:

"It's a wonder the ship-owners wouldn't have men here to meet their scabs."

The scorn with which the word was uttered for the second time that morning stung the boys.

"We're not scabs!" returned Phil, emphatically.

"Then what were them strikers mixing it up with yez for?" demanded the first officer.

"Were they strikers?" inquired Ted, incredulously.

"They sure were — did yez think they was a complimintery reciption committee?" grinned another.

"But what are they doing at the station here? I thought the strike was at the docks," pursued the boy.

"Well, you seen it ain't," returned the policeman; then added: "The strikers send some of their men to meet every train to learn whether any strike-breakers have been imported or not. If they find any, they try to persuade them not to go on board any of the boats, and if words don't do it, they use other means to prevent them."

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“ Unless we arrive on the scene in time,” supplemented a man on whose uniform were the stripes of a sergeant; then asked: “ If you are not scabs, what are you? ”

“ We are going to make the trip from Buffalo to Duluth on the ore boat Admiral as guests of Mr. Bronson, one of the owners in Boston,” replied Phil.

“ We are on our way to take up a homestead out in Washington State,” chimed in Ted, noting that the officers did not seem very much impressed by his brother’s statement. “ As those men were the only ones in sight, except some railroad men, when we stepped onto the platform, we asked them the way to the Waterfront Dock.”

“ The story sounds straight, Jerry,” opined one of the other officers. “ What’ll we do, escort ’em down to the dock? They’d never get there alone.”

The sergeant’s reply was interrupted by the hurried arrival of a pleasant-looking, middle-aged man.

“ Are you boys Phil and Ted Porter?” he asked.

“ We are,” chorused the lads.

“ You — er — haven’t had any trouble, I



hope?" and he looked anxiously from the boys to the policemen.

"No real trouble, though I'm afraid we should have if it had not been for these officers," returned Phil.

"Thank goodness! My automobile broke down on my way here; strikers been tampering with it, I suppose, and I was delayed in finding a taxicab. We'll go to my house for breakfast and then to the boat."

The boys, however, made no move, looking quizzically from the stranger to the officers, evidently determined not to walk into a second trap.

"You needn't be afraid of Mr. Atwood; he's one of the Admiral's owners," smiled the sergeant.

"By Jove! I was so alarmed seeing you boys with these officers that I have forgotten to introduce myself. I am Arthur Atwood, one of Bronson's partners. I received a wire from him, and also one from Tom Blair last night, telling me you were coming and to meet you — which I should have done if my machine had not broken down."

"We are sorry to have put you to such inconvenience, Mr. Atwood," said Phil.

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“Don’t mention it. I’d do anything for Bronson and Blair. Sergeant, just bring those bundles down to my taxi, if you don’t mind.”

Willingly the officers obeyed, and soon the boys, their host, and their belongings were safely in the taxicab.

“Like to have one of us ride on the box, Mr. Atwood?” asked the sergeant, as the chauffeur cranked up.

“No, I thank you. I have one of my own men driving;” and the machine dashed away, defying all speed laws.

The policemen, however, went along the sidewalk until their appearance dispersed a crowd that had gathered watching the ship-owner and the boys depart, their presence insuring a safe passage to the taxicab.

## CHAPTER VI

### BOARDING THE ADMIRAL

“**Y**OU will take the boys over to Niagara to see the Falls, I suppose,” observed Mrs. Atwood, looking at her husband when breakfast was finished.

“Oh, jolly! I’ve always wanted to go there, and this may be our only chance for years,” exclaimed Ted, eagerly.

Mr. Atwood, however, did not enthuse over the suggestion, being seemingly occupied in some mental calculation, but finally he said:

“I suppose I can, though I had not thought of it. Yes, we’ll go. A couple of hours more or less will not make much difference now that I have held the boat so long.”

His last words quickly checked the delight the boys were expressing at the opportunity to see the glorious spectacle, and Phil asked, in evident concern:

“Do you mean you have held the Admiral for Ted and me, Mr. Atwood?”

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"It doesn't matter," smiled their host.  
"Come, we must —"

"But indeed it *does* matter," interrupted Phil. "Did you hold the boat?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. She would have sailed at midnight for Toledo to load coal had I not received Bronson's wire."

"For Toledo?" exclaimed Mrs. Atwood.  
"Why can't you load here, and then the boys would have plenty of time to enjoy the falls and inspect the power-house on the Canadian side? I thought it was your policy never to send a boat up Lake Erie empty when you could help it?"

"This is one of the times when it cannot be helped. There is a report that some one has put dynamite in the coal at the docks, and none of the fleet managers, certainly *I* do not, care to run the risk of losing any boat by loading here. But come on, boys, we are only losing time by talking. Will you go with us, my dear?" and Mr. Atwood looked at his wife.

Ere she could reply, however, Phil spoke.

"We could not think of causing any more delay, Mr. Atwood," he declared. "It was more than kind of you to hold the boat as long as you have. We'll leave Niagara as a sight



for the future; it won't do to see everything at once, there'll be nothing left, you know."

The look of relief that showed on Mr. Atwood's face at the words made both boys glad they had renounced the trip to the Falls. And after thanking Mrs. Atwood for her hospitality, they followed the ship-owner to the piazza, expecting to see his automobile ready to take them to the dock.

"We will go out to the Admiral in my launch," said he, reading the boys' thoughts. "It will save any unpleasantness along the waterfront." And without more ado he set out at a brisk pace along a path which led through spacious grounds to a float at the shore of Lake Erie.

As they proceeded, they met several big powerful men, with whom their host spoke, and saw several others in the distance, evidently patrolling the estate.

Their presence, coupled with the incident at the station and Mr. Atwood's remark about the coal, suddenly filled the boys with an appreciation of the gravity of the situation, and they could not but admire the manner in which the ship-owner went about his business when he knew his movements were fraught with a danger

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so menacing that police offered him escort protection and watchmen guarded his home.

“Don’t you think we’d better go by train?” whispered Ted to his brother.

“And let Mr. Atwood and Mr. Bronson and Dr. Blair think we are ‘quitters’ after all the trouble to which they have been put?” retorted Phil.

“I hadn’t thought of that,” returned the younger boy.

“Then keep your wits about you.”

“I couldn’t help overhearing your conversation,” exclaimed Mr. Atwood, pausing until the boys came up with him. “I do not think there is any danger, though I advise you — I’d forbid you if I had the authority — not to go ashore wherever the Admiral touches. Our crew has been selected with great care, and Captain Perkins is one of the best men on the lakes. Still, if you prefer, I’ll get your tickets and you can go right through to your destination by train.”

“We’d rather, at least *I* should rather, go up the lakes on the Admiral,” said Ted, flushing deeply to think his momentary lapse of courage had been noticed.

“Then go you shall,” smiled the ship-owner,

and without more ado they went down to the float and entered a speedy-looking launch.

Scarcely had they seated themselves when the lines were cast loose, three men on the dock stepped aboard, the man at the engine pressed some levers, and the launch shot out into the lake.

"Look at those big boats anchored 'way out there," exclaimed Ted, as the launch rounded an arm of the inlet, which sheltered Mr. Atwood's boathouse and float, and gave them a glimpse of the city's harbour within the break-water.

"The one farthest out, from which you can see smoke rising, is the Admiral," announced Mr. Atwood.

"What a beauty!" chorused both boys, while Phil added:

"How much ore can she carry?"

"A little more than thirteen thousand tons."

"She must be a whopper," enthused Ted.

"She is. She is one of the biggest carriers on the lakes, five hundred and ninety-four feet over all and sixty-foot beam. She —"

His words were interrupted, however, by the movement, in the bow, of the three men who had boarded the launch at the float.

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So quickly that the boys could not see whence they had taken them, each man laid a rifle across his knees, ready for instant use, while they watched intently another launch that was bearing directly toward them.

Dazzlingly the sunlight glistened on the rifle barrels. Apparently the occupants of the other launch understood the cause of the scintillant flashes, for the boat suddenly veered, made a dangerously short turn, and dashed away up the lake. But the guards in Mr. Atwood's launch did not lay aside their weapons.

As they approached the Admiral, several men came to the rail.

"Boat ahoy! What do you want?" challenged one of them.

"Owner," answered a guard on the launch, and as the speedy craft ran alongside, a rope-ladder was quickly lowered from the deck, towering thirty feet above.

"I think you can climb aboard all right?" asked Mr. Atwood, as one of his men caught the end of the ladder.

"Surely," exclaimed Phil and Ted.

"Then good-bye, a pleasant trip and good luck with your homestead," exclaimed the ship-owner, shaking each boy cordially by the hand.



"Thank you, Mr. Atwood, and for your kindness too," returned his young guests. A nod and a smile was their answer as their host looked up and called: "Tell Perkins to come to the rail."

Already their luggage was being hauled aboard the ore carrier, as the word for the captain was passed along the deck, and Ted gave his brother a nudge.

"Come on; everybody will think we're afraid," he whispered, then hurried to the dangling ladder, grasped its rope sides, and scrambled, monkey-like, up toward the deck, quickly followed by Phil.

"Steady, there, steady! Take your time," admonished a kindly voice above them, as the rope-ladder swung and banged against the vessel's iron plates. "That's better. Keep a firm hold with your hands. There you are."

And as Ted reached the rail, two strong hands seized him under the arms and lifted him aboard, repeating the action with his brother.

"Those are Phil and Ted Porter, Perkins," called Mr. Atwood, "the boys for whom you were waiting. Remember, I shall hold you personally responsible for their safe arrival at Duluth."

"They'll get there O.K.," smiled the captain,

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shaking each guest cordially by the hand in completion of the introduction. "Any change in orders, Mr. Atwood?"

"No. Clear as soon as you can and good luck to you," returned the ship-owner.

And while the boys waved and shouted good-byes to Mr. Atwood as his launch sped away, sailors scurried about the ore carrier's deck, orders were shouted, Captain Perkins mounted his bridge, and chains began to clank, announcing the hauling up of the anchors.

Fascinated, Phil and Ted watched the big boat swing in answer to her helm, then straighten out for her run through the breakwater entrance, on the first leg of her trip.

"Look! look! There's that launch coming toward us again," suddenly cried Ted, pointing excitedly to the boat that had fled at the action of Mr. Atwood's guards.

Others had heard the boys' exclamation beside his brother, however, and four quick-moving men sprang to the rail, while members of the crew did likewise, stringing all along the length of the deck.

When the launch had come within an hundred feet of the Admiral, one of the four men near the boys shouted:

“Stand clear!”

In response, the speed of the launch was cut down and the occupants raised three megaphones, through which they shouted:

“Scabs! Scabs! You’ll never get to Duluth!”

At the hated epithet several members of the crew drew back to the other side of the deck, out of sight from the launch, and only the presence of the first mate beside them held the boys, for they felt that indescribable something about the derisive word which has cowed many a burly labourer.

From the bridge, however, Captain Perkins gave answer with several groaning toots on the whistle, but as the launch continued to follow, the megaphones barking their scorn, the skipper, fearing the effect on his crew, increased the volume of the whistle, those of the other ore carriers that had steam up adding with blasts from their whistles, until the cries were lost in the pandemonium of toots.

## CHAPTER VII

### ANXIOUS MOMENTS

WHEN the Admiral had passed out of the breakwater into the lake, Captain Perkins called the first mate, gave him some instructions, and then descended from the bridge.

“I’ll show you your staterooms,” he said, as he joined the boys. “Hey, some of you deck hands, fetch that dunnage this way!”

The members of the crew who had inspected Ted and Phil interestedly, because they had been brought to the boat by one of the owners, were even more impressed at the skipper’s words, for seldom does a captain escort passengers to their cabins, usually delegating the task to one of his mates, and several sprang to get the bags and packages.

The boys, however, were before them, and as they picked them up, Phil said:

“We don’t wish to cause any bother, Captain Perkins.”

“You just bet we don’t. Why, we even want



you to let us work with the crew," added Ted, to whom so doing seemed more like a lark than real labour.

"We'll see about that later," smiled the skipper. "You deck hands, get busy sweeping the decks! On the jump now!" And when the sailors obeyed, he led the way to the staterooms in the bow.

"Isn't this 'scrumptious'!" cried Ted, as they entered a spacious cabin, finished in Flemish oak, with silk-curtained windows, heavy carpet, two brass beds in lieu of the traditional bunks, tables, electric lights and fans, and comfortable lounging chairs. "I never imagined they had such cabins on anything but private yachts or ocean steamers."

"Every ore carrier has them nowadays for owners and their guests," smiled the captain, adding with a tinge of bitterness which all lake skippers and sailors feel: "Some day people will realize that lake boats are as important and require even more skill to handle than salt-water vessels. Wait until we go up the Detroit and St. Mary's rivers, then you will understand what I mean. Why, a salt-water skipper would think he must have a fleet of tugs to do what is but a matter of daily routine with us. And a six-

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hundred-foot boat is no toy to handle in the storms, fogs, and ice we have, either. But maybe you'll have the chance to see for yourselves. I'm going down to the engine room, — would you like to come? ”

Eagerly the boys accepted the invitation, glad to see all the working of the ship they could, but they did not know that the chief danger to the boat lay in the engine and boiler rooms from ignorance of the crew in regard to the machinery or from faulty firing, burning out the flues of the boilers, or dynamite in the coal.

As they descended the ladder into the engine room, they gasped at the heat, while the smell of oil almost sickened them and the clang of the engines made their heads throb.

In and out among the fast-moving machinery men, shirtless, their faces glistening with perspiration, crawled, long-nosed oil-cans in hand, from which they deftly poured the lubricant upon this or that joint or bearing or wiped a rod with waste.

“ I don't see what keeps them from being ground to pieces,” exclaimed Phil, when they had stood for several minutes, fascinated by the sight.

“ Experience,” replied the captain, “ but you

can get an idea how necessary it is to have oilers who know their business."

"How often do they crawl around that way?" inquired Ted.

"All the time, practically. Some bearings use more oil than others, and if one gets dry, it will weld and cause trouble."

"But don't they ever sleep?"

"Oh, yes. We have two shifts, you know. Each one works six hours and then rests six hours."

"Ah, here comes Mr. Morris, the chief engineer." And after introducing the boys, the captain asked: "Men working all right?"

"All but one, Swanson. I've had to follow him round."

From the expression that settled on the skipper's face, Phil and Ted realized the information was serious.

"Green at the job?" inquired the captain.

"No, ugly."

"Send him to me in half an hour if he doesn't get onto his job. Anything else? How are the firemen doing?"

"All right, I reckon. I haven't had time to go down on account of Swanson."

"Why didn't you send your assistant down?"

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“He’s there, sir.” Then turning to the boys, he said: “How do you think you would like to work down here?”

“I love machinery. I was building an air-ship at home. I know I should like it if it weren’t for the heat,” replied Ted.

“If you think this is hot, just go down into the stoke hole,” smiled the chief. Then, as there sounded a discordant note in the hum of the machinery, he darted away to learn its cause, while the captain led the way across the iron grating, which served as floor, to another ladder leading down to the boiler room.

As Phil put his hand on one of the iron rungs, he drew it back hastily.

“Phe-ew, but that’s hot!” he exclaimed, and, taking out his handkerchief, he used it to protect his hand as he descended—a precaution which his brother also adopted.

When at last the boys stood on the floor, they could scarcely breathe, so terrific was the heat from the furnaces, as men, stripped to the buff, jerked open the iron doors beneath the huge boilers and shovelled coal into the roaring flames or levelled the fires with long pokers.

While the captain was talking with a man whom the young passengers decided was the as-



sistant engineer, they followed a line of men with great iron wheelbarrows through a door and found themselves in the coal bunkers.

The men returning with the empty barrows seized shovels and began to load, every now and then pausing to pick up a sledge-hammer and break up a huge chunk of the soft coal. And as fast as one was loaded, he pushed his barrow, staggering and swaying to meet the pitching of the boat, into the fire room.

“I don’t see how you can keep your feet,” exclaimed Phil to one of the men.

“Oh, this is nothing. You ought to see us when there is a storm and she’s pitching and rolling. Then it is some trick to keep on your ‘pins.’ Why, I’ve seen the time when I had my barrow dump four times in succession before I could get out of the bunkers, and the firemen yelling like Indians for more coal. Yah, this is nothing — after you get used to it.”

Too fierce for the boys to linger long was the combination of heat and coal dust, and, choking and coughing, they returned to the boiler room.

“Think you’d rather be a ‘coal passer’ than an oiler?” smiled the captain, but before either of his passengers could reply, he caught sight of a passer sneaking into the bunkers with a

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pail from which protruded a piece of ice. "Hey, you, bring that pail here!" he shouted.

Surlily the passer obeyed.

"Don't you know better than to take clear ice water in there?" demanded the skipper, sternly.

"We got to have something cold to drink," growled the man.

"Surely; I know that. But if you drink clear ice water in this heat, every passer in your watch will be yelling with cramps inside of half an hour."

"Oh, I'll risk 'em," retorted the fellow.

"Well, I wont. You just set that pail down here, jump up that ladder, go to the steward, and say I told him to give you three pounds of oatmeal."

The captain's manner was not one to brook delay or disobedience, and, muttering to himself, the passer went above, returning in due course with the oatmeal, which he gave to the skipper.

"Now you can drink," said the latter, emptying the oatmeal into the pail, where it quickly formed a thin, milky gruel, "without getting cramps. Mr. Peters," and he turned to the assistant, "keep your eyes open to see that no clear ice water comes down here. Pass the word

that any man drinking clear ice water will be put in irons. I won't have my passers knocked out on the very first day."

The assistant started to deliver the order in the bunkers, when he was stopped by a frantic whistling at the speaking tube leading down from the engine room.

With a bound he reached it, the captain and the boys joining him.

"What is it?" he called.

While he listened for an answer, the chief fairly slid down the ladder.

"Quick! Draw the fire under number three! She's almost out of water!" he yelled.

No need was there to tell the firemen that a boiler out of water, with a roaring fire underneath, would soon explode, probably foundering the ship, and while one leaped and threw open the door to the fire box, the assistant and the others seized long-handled iron rakes and pokers and pulled the seething mass of burning coal out onto the iron floor.

Terrific before, as the boiler room was transformed into a glowing inferno, the heat became unbearable, and first one and then another of the firemen staggered back, gasping.

"Get back on the job! The fire isn't half

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out!" bellowed Mr. Morris, snatching a rake and springing to the task.

Inspired by their chief's example, the men obeyed, only to fall back again.

"Above, there!" yelled the captain, going to the foot of the ladder, and as a face appeared at the hatch, he continued: "Call the off watch. Tell the second mate to form a bucket line and pass water down here. On the jump—if you don't want to be blown to glory!"

Gathering about the door of the bunkers, the coal passers stood, talking in whispers, then suddenly they rushed for the ladder.

Captain Perkins heard the patter of their feet and, divining their purpose, grabbed a bar, beat them to the ladder, faced them and swung the bar, shouting:

"Back into your bunkers and load your barrows!"

The men, with sullen snarls, refused to obey, however, and several of them were sneaking to the back of the ladder, when from above a pail of water was dashed onto their heads.

Surprised, they stopped, and before they recovered from the shock, the second mate was among them, kicking and cuffing them back to the bunkers.



“Some one take these pails,” called a voice from the hatch above.

Glad of the opportunity to be of some use, the boys sprang up the ladder and took positions from which Phil could hand the pails to Ted, who, in turn, passed them to the captain, and he threw their contents onto the heads, backs, and breasts of the chief and firemen who were working so desperately to rake out the fire.

The water, falling on the live coals, formed clouds of steam, but it revived the men and soon came the voice of the chief:

“Belay the water! She’s raked out.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BOYS PROVE THEIR METAL

“**H**OW long will those fires under the other boilers hold, Mr. Morris?” asked the captain, as the chief engineer came up to him.

“About ten minutes at the present speed, sir.”

“How long if we anchor?”

“Two hours, certainly, perhaps three.”

“Good! Will you carry a message for me, Phil?” the skipper asked suddenly, turning to the boy.

“I’m here, sir,” hurriedly announced the second mate, his tone and manner showing his resentment that the duty of bearing important communications should be entrusted to a land-lubber.

“I know it, Hansen, and I want you to stay here,” returned the captain, testily. “How about it, Phil?”

“Surely, Captain Perkins,” replied the boy.

“Then go to the bridge and tell Mr. Adams, the first mate, to slow down until he barely has steerage way, then to turn the wheel over to the wheelsman and join me here. Understand?”

The boy was part-way up the ladder by the time the instructions were finished, and he never stopped in his ascent as he called back his “Yes, sir.”

Smiling at the excited eagerness of the young passenger, the skipper turned to the chief engineer.

“Mr. Morris, have your assistant go above to the engine room and keep his eye on Swanson,” he instructed.

“I’ll go myself, sir.”

“No, I want you here.”

Quickly the chief went to his assistant, who was puttering around the recently raked fire box, and delivered the order.

In evident reluctance to leave before the cause of the lack of water had been discovered, the man obeyed.

“Mate, tell the coal passers and firemen to go on deck and cool off,” continued the captain, “and you, chief, go above and bring down some extension lights, wrenches, and whatever else you think we may need.”

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Now that the danger of the boiler exploding was over, the firemen and coal passers were loath to go above, all being eager to learn the cause of the difficulty. Captain Perkins, however, was determined that only his highest officers should share the knowledge when it was ascertained, and he hastened the ascent of the lagging passers with a few curt orders.

“How about this boy, sir?” inquired the second mate, nodding at Ted.

Ere the skipper could reply, the first mate slid down the ladder, and after a hasty glance at the raked fire asked:

“What’s wrong, skipper?”

“I don’t know. Water got low in No. 3 boiler. Ah, here’s Morris. Help him adjust his extension lights and then we’ll find out.”

Springing forward, the two mates took the coils of insulated cable, with wire-encased bulbs on one end, and quickly adjusted the other end to the sockets of the stationary electric lights and turned on the current.

“You take one lamp, Morris, and I’ll take the other,” said the skipper. “Adams, you and Hansen make ready to examine the flues in case we don’t find any —”

“Wait a minute, Captain Perkins, wait a



minute," called a voice from the hatchway, and looking up, those below beheld Phil, a paper fluttering in his hand.

"I've a wireless for you, Captain," exclaimed the boy excitedly, as he scrambled down the ladder.

"Plague take the thing! instructions from Atwood, I suppose," growled the skipper as he reached out for the sheet of paper. "The wireless is a fine thing in time of trouble or accident, but it's a nuisance having the owners able to reach you any moment. A captain can't run his own boat any longer. Dewey knew what he was about when he cut the cable after he had taken Manila. I —"

"Swanson's reported sick and wants to go to his bunk," interrupted the assistant engineer.

Instantly the chief and the mates exchanged hurried glances, then looked at their superior, but he seemed too absorbed in reading the despatch to have heard.

That he had heard, however, was quickly evident. After reading the message a second time, he thrust it into his pocket, then faced his officers, who were amazed at the sternness of his expression.

"So the dog's reported sick, has he?" he

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snapped. "Well, keep him in the engine room until I can get up there. Mr. Adams, fetch the irons."

Their faces looking the questions discipline forbade them asking, the officers followed the captain up the ladder, all having disappeared through the hatch while the two boys stood staring after them.

"Wonder what the trouble is?" murmured Ted.

"It's about Swanson. I read the message, only don't let on," returned his brother.

"What did it say?"

"Never mind. Didn't you see the skipper wouldn't show it to the others?"

"I can keep a secret as well as you — and I'll tell Captain Perkins unless you tell me," asserted Ted.

"Come close then." And as his brother obeyed, Phil whispered in his ear, "It said: 'Watch your boilers closely. Relieve oiler Swanson from duty upon receipt of this message and place in irons. Put him ashore at Toledo. Will have man there to take his place. Atwood.'"

"Crickey! Then it's Swanson who tampered with —"

“Keep still!” snapped his brother.

The caution, however, was unnecessary, for there came sounds of scuffling from above that would have drowned anything but the loudest shout from below.

An instant the boys gazed at one another. Then, actuated by the same impulse, they sprang for the ladder and were mounting it, when a form appeared in the hatchway, and a foot began to feel for a ladder rung, while a voice snarled:

“You’ll never put me in irons.”

“Quick, some of you, Adams, Morris! Don’t let the fellow get below!” roared the voice of the captain.

A mocking laugh was the oiler’s answer as he threw his legs about the ladder and started to slide down.

So sudden had been the appearance of the man that the boys had only time to mount a couple of rungs, and as they heard the skipper’s words, they stepped back.

His training as captain of his school nine had taught Phil to think quickly, and as he beheld the oiler sliding down he exclaimed to his brother:

“Stand on that side of the ladder. Grab

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his arms when he comes down. I'll take his legs."

Startled at the sound of voices below him when he thought every one was above, Swanson turned his head and saw the boys.

Ere he could check himself, however, Phil had seized his legs in a most effectual football tackle, and, though the oiler kicked desperately, the boy managed to hold on.

Unable to reach the fellow's arms, Ted sprang to his brother's assistance.

"Pretty work! Good boys! Hang to him!" came from the hatchway, as the captain and his officers beheld the scene below, and almost before the shouts of encouragement had ceased the skipper and his first mate were in the fire room and Swanson was overpowered.

"Take him on deck, Captain?" asked the second mate.

"No. Make him fast to a stanchion and then we'll get to work again."

The task was quickly accomplished, and picking up the lights and tools, the men once more started to examine the boiler.

Determined not to miss any of the excitement, the boys had preceded the others, and as the light illumined the back of the boiler, Ted



glanced at a pipe, then rushed to that of the next boiler and felt of it.

"The stop-cock in the feed pipe is shut off!" he cried excitedly. "See, Captain Perkins!" and he pointed to the brass handle which stood at right angles to the pipe instead of in line with it.

Investigation by the chief engineer proved that Ted's statement was correct.

"Pretty good for a boy, eh, Sam?" asked the captain, turning to his engineer.

"I told you I liked machinery," returned Ted, happily.

"Want a job?" smiled the chief.

"I'd like it if I weren't going farming."

"You'll earn more here and with less work."

"Perhaps, but if I hadn't made up my mind to be a farmer, I should have stuck to my airship, sir."

"Well, any time you change your mind, just send word to Sam Morris, in care of Mr. Atwood, and he'll find you a place."

During this conversation the chief had turned the stop-cock to its rightful position.

"Water's rising in No. 3's glass," shouted the assistant engineer from the hatch. "Found the trouble?"

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“ Yes.”

“ What was it? ”

“ Tell you by and by.”

The trick which had put the splendid vessel and her crew in such jeopardy was so simple that the chief did not dare announce it, lest some of the crew should hear it and perhaps repeat the operation in the event of their becoming disgruntled.

The trouble remedied, the oiler was taken on deck, the coal passers and firemen returned to their stations, the fire was rekindled under No. 3, the first mate returned to the bridge, and soon the Admiral was bowling along at her usual speed.

As the boys walked forward with the skipper, Ted noticed a steel cable, fully half an inch in diameter, that extended from the cabins forward to the deck houses aft.

“ What’s that for, Captain? ” he inquired. “ I noticed it before, but I forgot to ask about it.”

“ We call it our ‘ trolley.’ It’s really a life line. When we are loaded, we have only a couple of feet free board. If a bad storm comes up, the waves pour over the deck and it is dangerous work to walk from one end of the boat to

the other. In such weather, and especially in the fall, when the deck is ice-coated, the men sling a bo's'n's chair to a wheel, place the wheel on the cable, and slide back and forth."

"No, tell me really, please," returned the boy, eying the skipper incredulously.

"And so I am. If you could see some of the storms we have, with waves twenty or thirty feet high pouring over the deck, you'd realize a man takes his life in his hands when he tries to walk the length of the boat."

"Well, I hope we don't have any such weather," declared Phil, as they mounted the bridge and entered the pilot house, where they watched the wheelsman hold the big carrier on its course and later saw the first mate enter the incident of the boiler room in the log-book.

"By the way, Mr. Adams, has the log been set?" asked Captain Perkins, as he entered the pilot house.

"Jove, I forgot it, sir, in the excitement."

"Then tell the watchman to set it."

As the officer started off in obedience, the boys followed him.

Entering the lamp room, which was located in one of the after-deck houses, the watchman took down a coil of cod line to one end of which

was attached a small brass swivel, while to the other end was fastened a hook. Then he took down a brass-encased instrument which looked like a small edition of an iceman's scales. Going to one of the stanchions near the stern of the boat, on the starboard side, the watchman made the indicator fast with a piece of rope, then placed the hook of the log line in its hole, and lowered the log into the water.

"The only trick about this is to be careful not to lower so fast that the hook jumps out of its hole. If it does, the log is lost," explained the watchman. "You have to look out, too, to drop the log far enough out so that it doesn't get foul of the ship's propeller."

"But how does it work?" asked Phil.

As the line was all paid out and the log was churning through the water, the watchman pointed to the scale-like indicator.

"Just look at that pointer and you'll see," he replied. "The log pulls on the line, which, in turn, pulls on the scale, and the number to which the indicator points is the speed we are making. It's easier to read than the old-fashioned wooden log."

"It points to ten, now," declared Ted.

"She'll go higher as soon as No. 3 gets back



into commission. We average between fourteen and fifteen knots an hour, empty."

"How fast loaded?" asked Phil.

"Between ten and twelve; depends on the wind and currents."

"How long do you keep the log overboard?" inquired the younger boy.

"All the time except when we enter a harbour, or the canal, and going through the Detroit and St. Mary's rivers."

"Why not then?"

"Because the navigation rules compel us to slacken speed and there are too many boats to be passed. Hooray, it's grub time," he added, as a boy in white coat and apron passed along the deck ringing a big bell.

## CHAPTER IX

### A SERIES OF REVELATIONS

“**I** DON'T suppose the food will be very good,” confided Phil to his brother, as they removed the traces of the exciting morning, in their cabin.

“No, according to the sea stories I've read it won't,” returned Ted. “Just salt pork, hard tack, and weak coffee, I expect.”

“Then you are due for a surprise,” exclaimed a hearty voice, and, turning, the boys beheld the captain. At the thought that their uncomplimentary remarks had been overheard, the boys grew crimson. But the skipper prevented any attempt at apology by saying: “I hope some time some one will write a story and tell the honest truth about the food we sailors have on the Great Lakes. Maybe it's pork and hard tack on salt water — and from some of their sailors I've seen that's plenty good enough for them — but if we don't set better meals than nine out of ten of our men have at home, then I don't know a buoy from a light-house.”

Deeming it best to say nothing, the boys quickly finished their ablutions and accompanied the skipper aft to the dining-cabin.

On the port side the boys beheld the crew seated at tables covered with white oil cloth. Each table was provided with a big portion of corned beef and cabbage, fish, potatoes, squash, peas, pies, bread, and cake, while from the coffee-pots there came the savoury aroma of good coffee.

“ See any hard tack? ” smiled the captain.

“ It looks bully,” exclaimed Phil. “ Where do we sit, anywhere? ”

“ You’ll eat at the officers’ table; ” and the captain quickly led the way into a dining-room seemingly perfect in its appointments and handsomely furnished.

The officers were seated according to their rank, the navigating force on one side and the engine room, including the oilers, on the other, but as the men who were eating were the ones going on watch, there was plenty of room for the young homesteaders.

The boy in the white coat and apron, who had rung the bell, waited upon the table, serving soup and a dinner much the same as that of the crew, save that there was roast lamb as well as

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corned beef and cabbage, a greater variety of cake, and a pudding in addition to the pies.

Well cooked and appetizing, the meal would have been good in any event, but with appetites sharpened by the bracing air, it tasted delicious to the boys, and the skipper smiled as they took second helpings.

As rapidly as the men finished, they withdrew, going to their stations to relieve the men on duty, for until the second watch came on, the first watch were obliged to remain at their posts.

“Now what do you think?” asked Captain Perkins, as they passed out on deck.

“That the men who wrote those stories didn’t know what they were writing about or had never sailed on an ore carrier,” responded Ted.

“And the grub is just as good on the other boats,” asserted the skipper. “Of course, some lines feed better than others, but it’s all wholesome and well cooked.”

During the afternoon the boys amused themselves with the binoculars, studying the ships they passed and watching people on shore when they could find any.

Toward dusk they noticed a pall of smoke off the port bow.

“Must be a big fire,” commented Phil.



“It can’t be a prairie fire, can it?” eagerly asked his brother, who, like most New Englanders, considered everything west of the Hudson River prairie.

“That’s Cleveland,” smiled the captain. “Take the glasses and perhaps you can make out the tall buildings.” But the smoky haze was too dense.

At sundown the ship’s pennant and the Stars and Stripes were hauled down, after which the big electric masthead lights were switched on, and then the red and green running lights, for starboard and port respectively.

With the setting of the sun a brisk breeze sprang up, whipping the water into cat’s paws, as white caps are called on the lakes, and the huge carrier began to pound, owing to its emptiness.

“I should think she’d break in two,” exclaimed Ted, the rising and resounding fall of the bow seeming, to his inexperience, a serious matter.

“Go aft and you’ll scarcely notice any motion,” explained the first mate.

The boys, however, preferred to stay in the pilot house, where the wheelsman allowed them to take turns in holding the vessel on her course, whenever the mate was absent.

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“Where are we now?” asked Ted, as the boys came on deck early the next morning and discovered they were passing through a seeming water lane, flanked on both sides by planking which topped the water by some two feet.

“Going up the channel into the Maumee River,” answered a watchman, for the captain and his mate were on the bridge, occasionally calling sharp orders to the wheelsman in the pilot house below. “We’re in Toledo harbour, now.”

Too afraid they would miss something of interest, Phil and Ted barely touched their breakfast, despite its tempting fruit, flapjacks, and steak, and soon they were on deck again, watching the monster draws in the bridges swing open in answer to the carrier’s signals, and the ever-changing shore line of the city.

“Look at those funny old scows, with little dinky engines and long spouts, skimming along! What on earth are they?” exclaimed Phil, pointing to a score or more of such craft that were scurrying, crablike, down the river.

“Those are sand-suckers,” explained the mate. “When they get to their positions they drop those spouts into the sand and then suck it into

the boats; the water runs out and the sand is left in the scow."

A terrific screech on the Admiral's whistle called their attention to one of the suckers that had crossed her bow so near that only a sharp throwing over of the wheel prevented a collision.

Roundly Captain Perkins berated the man in the pilot house, but a grin was his only answer.

Approach to the dock quickly diverted the skipper, however, as he called orders to his wheelsman that brought the six-hundred-foot carrier alongside as easily as though she had been no more than a launch.

Lake carriers are met by no linesmen to help them on the docks, or throw their hawsers over the spilings, and as the boat swung alongside the heavy timbers, members of the crew sprang to the wharf. To them the lines were thrown, and in an incredibly short time the Admiral was fast, bow and stern.

Towering above the dock was a structure resembling a huge skeleton elevator shaft, along the top of which extended an iron shield that drew together from both sides in an enormous shute.

Back of the dock was a labyrinth of tracks and switches, upon some of which stood strings

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of loaded coal cars, and even as the Admiral made fast, a switch engine began to puff and snort, jerking a line of cars onto the track that ran between the uprights of the elevator-like structure.

Directly behind the tracks rose a sand bank, along the top of which an occasional trolley car passed.

The boat docked, Captain Perkins ordered the discredited oiler brought to him.

“I’m going to take you up town, Swanson, and I warn you not to make any trouble,” said he, tapping his side pocket, which bulged suggestively. “Mr. Adams, pass the word to the men off watch that there is to be no shore leave. Come, Swanson!” And the skipper stepped onto the dock, apparently unmindful that he had turned his back on his prisoner.

The members of the crew, however, watched the oiler closely, and as he did not start instantly, the first mate snapped significantly:

“Didn’t you hear?”

Apparently Swanson had heard, for he stepped onto the dock and disappeared from sight, walking beside the burly ship-master.

“Nerviest man I ever saw, the skipper,” exclaimed Mr. Adams, his admiration of his supe-



rior evident in his voice. "There isn't another man on the lakes who would take Swanson, unshackled and without a police guard, up town."

"Then you think Captain Perkins is in danger?" inquired Phil.

"Danger?" repeated the first mate; "just look at that hill!" And he nodded toward the sand bank which, though nothing but a bare hillside when Phil and Ted had first noticed it, was now swarming with men and boys.

"Who are they? Where did they come from?" asked both young passengers at once.

"Strikers!" exclaimed the second mate.

"More likely sympathizers; the strikers are pretty orderly," returned Mr. Adams. "If Swanson should call on them for help, they'd attack."

"Quick, get behind the cabin!" he shouted excitedly, interrupting himself.

Without waiting to ask the reason, the boys obeyed, and with them went all of the crew near at hand. Scarcely had they gained the protection of the deck houses than there was a patter like hail on the iron deck.

"Stones," said Mr. Adams, simply.

"They do hate to see a boat take on cargo,"

asserted Hansen. "Wonder where our guards are?"

The guards themselves answered the question, for barely had the shower of stones ceased than the four men whom Phil and Ted had noticed when they boarded the Admiral sprang from the cabin, revolvers in hand, rushed across the deck, leaped to the dock, and, joined by similarly armed guards who appeared from among the freight cars, charged up the bank.

Not long did the crowd linger on the hill when they saw the guards, and as the men and boys scattered in all directions, an automobile dashed up from which six policemen jumped out and began to patrol the top of the sand bank.

Ever since the Admiral had docked, men had been working about the elevator and in the adjoining engine room.

"All ready?" called one of them to the mate.

Recalled to his business, Mr. Adams looked along the deck. Every hatch cover was in place.

"Lively, open those hatches, Hansen," he snapped; then, raising his voice, he answered, "All ready."

There was the whir of drums winding up

steel cables, then a snort from the engine as they tightened.

“Look! look!” cried Ted, grabbing his brother’s arm, “a coal car is going up on the elevator.”

Interestedly the boys watched as the big steel car, heaped with coal, slowly ascended; then a rattle on deck called their attention, and they turned just in time to see the hatch covers roll back from the hatches, operated by a series of rods to which electricity supplied the power.

As the covers were removed, the men on top of the coal elevator moved the mouth of the shute by levers until it was over the central hatch.

By this time the car had reached the top of the elevator.

“All ready?” shouted one of the men on top.

“Let her go,” returned the first mate, having gone to the middle hatch and squinted at the mouth of the shute, thirty feet above him.

There sounded the click of more levers, again the whir of the drums, followed by the snort of the engine, and the boys beheld one side of the car tip forward as the rear of the elevator platform rose, then the coal thundered against the shield, rattled into the shute, and, amid a

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cloud of black dust, shot through the hatch into the hold with a roar.

“Why, the coal car is on its side,” cried Ted, looking at the elevator. “It’s been turned up until it’s empty.”

Even as the boy spoke, there came the click of levers again, the platform dropped back, righting the car, which in due course was lowered to the ground, where it was backed off by another car that was, in turn, raised and dumped.

“Some class to loading coal by the carful, what?” asked Mr. Adams, noting the boys’ amazement.

“It’s wonderful,” replied Phil. “How long will it take to fill the hold?”

“About three hours, if everything works well.”

As one compartment was filled, the boat was shifted back or forth for the shute to be over one of the various hatches.

When about half the cargo had been taken aboard, however, the loading was stopped by a lack of coal and the boys had retired before work was resumed.



## CHAPTER X

### THE UNUSUAL POSTMAN

“**W**AKE up if you want any breakfast,” exclaimed the steward’s assistant, called the “cookee” in sailors’ parlance, as he shook Ted none too gently by the shoulder, adding, as the boy opened his eyes: “I can’t fool round waiting all day for you. I’ve got my dishes to do and the vegetables to prepare for dinner.”

Aroused by the voice, Phil sat up in his bed, then sprang out, and, with his brother, began hurriedly to dress, while the cookee lingered, much interested in watching the proceedings.

“Have we finished loading?” asked Ted, noting that the many noises, to be heard on every side when he retired, were silent.

“Can’t you tell from the quiver of the boat that we’re steaming?” returned the lad, scornfully. “I supposed even a ‘lubber’ could tell the difference between the motion of a boat when she’s going and when she’s tied to the dock.”

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"You must remember we are not sailors like you," interposed Phil hastily, winking at his brother and preventing the angry retort he saw Ted was about to make. "I suppose you have been a sailor for a number of years?"

"Uhuh! I've been running on ore boats for four seasons," returned the cookee, mollified by the flattering allusion to his service in the galley as being a sailor.

"When did we leave the dock?" asked Ted, proffering a box of candy.

"Two o'clock. And say, you've missed a circus," he added, all aversion to the "young dudes," as he had dubbed the boys, banished by the candy to which he helped himself liberally.

"What was it?" chorused Phil and Ted.

"You heard the skipper tell Adams there was to be no shore leave? Well, the wheelsman of the first watch sneaked ashore last evening and went up town. When he came back, some strikers caught him on the sand hill and, say, they certainly gave it to him good and plenty. If some of our men aboard hadn't heard his yells, they would have pounded him to a jelly. But just wait until you see him."

"Did Captain Perkins bring back the new oiler?" asked Ted.

“ Sure.”

“ Have any trouble? ”

“ Not him. Say, he could walk through a crowd of all the strikers put together and there wouldn't one lay a hand to him.”

“ Why not? ”

“ Because they know him. Once, when there was a mutiny on one of his boats, he laid out ten coal passers with his ‘ dukes.’ ” Then, waxing confidential, he added: “ Take it from me and don't bother him with no question today, he's got a fierce grouch.”

“ Why? ”

“ 'Cause he got word from Atwood to keep the four guards on board to Duluth. He ain't got no use for them ginks, and he's mad.”

During this imparting of the incidents of the night and ship's gossip Phil and Ted had finished dressing and were on the point of going on deck, when the cookee exclaimed:

“ Just wait until I can get back to the galley before you'se come out; if you don't, I'll get twigged for staying in here so long; ” and quickly the lad departed.

As the boys emerged from their cabin, they gazed about them in surprise. Not a speck of land could they see, and the feeling was a novel

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one as they realized for the first time the sensation of being out of sight of land.

A stiff breeze kicked up the water, and as they proceeded to the dining-room, showers of spray now and then fell on the deck.

"Why, we're only two or three feet above the water," exclaimed Phil, going to the rail.

"Say we only have 'two or three feet free board,' you land-lubber," chuckled his brother. "You didn't suppose we'd ride high with all that coal aboard, did you?"

"Of course not, but we're loaded with coal, not ore, and coal isn't as heavy as copper or iron."

"It's a good thing I'm the only one to hear you talk," grinned Ted, "or I'd blush to think you were my brother. What's the difference between the weight of thirteen thousand tons of coal and thirteen thousand tons of ore?"

The twinkle in Ted's eyes caused Phil to hesitate, then continue: "Why, er, none, of course, but you needn't be so cockey. A ton of coal takes more room than a ton of ore, so they couldn't put thirteen thousand tons of coal aboard."

"They could, too. If a boat's capacity is thirteen thousand tons, she can carry thirteen thousand tons, whether it's sawdust or mercury."



“Not if the bulk is too great,” returned Phil.

For several moments the brothers argued the problem, and then, as the first mate came in sight, Ted said:

“We’ll leave it to Mr. Adams.”

Readily Phil consented, and as the mate came up, they stated their opinions on the question at issue.

“Ted is right,” smiled Mr. Adams. “The point is this, while the coal fills the hold, because of its greater volume per unit, there is plenty of room in the hold after we have thirteen thousand tons of ore aboard because of its greater weight per unit. Why, if we should fill the Admiral with copper or iron ore, she’d sink like a plummet.”

“How do you know when she is loaded to her capacity — keep track of the tons?”

“That would be too difficult a task. The cars from which we load coal vary in the number of tons they carry, just as some of the ore pockets from which we load contain more ore than others. We save all trouble by loading until the keel is so many feet below the surface of the water, the tonnage carried varying in accordance with the depth of water over certain bars on our course and at the canal. On this

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trip we are only loaded to seventeen feet four inches. But as the water in the lakes is rising, when we come down we may be able to load to eighteen or nineteen feet."

"But how can you know to what depth to load?" asked the elder of the boys.

"An association, to which the owners or managers of the principal fleets belong, maintains men at the various shoals and bars who report the depth of the water night and morning. At the canal the information is furnished by the United States Government. Knowing the length of time, under ordinary conditions, it will take a carrier to cover the distance between the loading ports and the points involved, the captains load in accordance with the latest reports, which are always telegraphed them."

"A captain is compelled to know a lot of things, isn't he?" exclaimed Ted.

"Right you are — and his mates as well. He must know the locations of the light-houses, with their various kind of lights — revolving, steady, two-colored, long or short flash, and the rest — of the harbour and channel lights, and buoys. We don't have any pilots come aboard to take us into harbour, as the salt-water boats do. Every captain and first mate must qualify as a

pilot as well as a navigating officer before he can obtain his 'papers,' as they call the license issued by the United States Government to sail a ship."

"Crickey, it's no easy job, I should think," declared Phil.

"You'll be sure of it when we have passed through the Detroit and St. Mary's rivers," smiled Mr. Adams, as he turned to set the deck hands at work washing away the coal dust from deck and cabins, while the boys went to breakfast.

"Look, look, there's land again!" cried Ted, when they returned to deck, and hurrying to the bridge, they asked what it was.

"Canada," replied Mr. Adams.

"The first foreign country I ever saw," exclaimed the boy, as both he and Phil studied it closely.

"You'll see enough of it until we pass the Soo," returned the mate. "We'll be so close to it going up the St. Mary's you can toss a pebble ashore.

"We're making the Detroit River, Mr. Perkins," called the mate, turning from the boys.

Quickly Captain Perkins emerged from his

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cabin, and with a curt nod to his young guests, took his place beside his first officer.

As the nose of the Admiral passed between the buoys marking the channel, the skipper rang for half speed, and the big boat crept up the tortuous river, now passing carriers bound down, now splitting the air with her whistle as she announced her course.

To the left the sky-scrapers of Detroit came into sight, and across the river from them the comparatively quiet hamlet of Winsor, Canada, the difference in the two towns forming an eloquent commentary upon the aggressiveness and methods of American business men.

"There's a launch headed for us," cried Phil, as they came abreast of the city.

"That's our postman," explained the captain. "If you boys have any letters to send, be lively and take them to the watchman on deck, the man making a line fast to a mail bag."

"I didn't know you could send or receive letters except at ports," declared Ted. "Do you suppose he'd wait while I scribble a line to my mother?"

"I'm afraid not. You see, he and his relief have to meet every ship going up and down the river during the day and night, so they can't



tarry at one boat long. It's a splendid institution for sailors, this Marine Post Office. It tends to keep a man contented when he can hear from home at the canal and at Detroit on his trips up and down. It is also convenient for skippers and owners to send orders and reports."

While listening, the boys had watched the launch as it darted, with the speed of a racer, toward the Admiral; then its occupant swerved it, and shut off his power. As the boat ran alongside the big carrier under its momentum, he picked up his heaving line and cast it deftly to the watchman on deck, who made a quick turn around a cleat so that the mail launch was fast alongside ere its own headway had died.

Picking up the mail bag, the watchman lowered it to the postman, who removed the letters it contained, put in a package addressed to the Admiral, tucked in several newspapers which members of the crew ordered, then put on his power as his line was cast loose, and scudded away to another carrier, bound down.

Untying the package of mail, the watchman looked through it, distributing such as there was for the crew, then mounted the bridge with the remainder, which he gave to the captain.

"Seems to be mostly for you, boys," said the

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skipper, and he handed over to them a score or more of post cards and letters.

“ But how in the world did any one at home know about this Marine Post Office? ” exclaimed Ted, as he eagerly took the missives addressed to him.

“ I suppose Dr. Blair told Momsy and the girls, and they passed the word along,” said his brother.

“ Well, it certainly is a ‘ splendid institution,’ ” confirmed the younger boy. And many were the exclamations of amusement and delight as they perused their letters and read the bits of advice and good wishes written on the post cards.

## CHAPTER XI

### UP THE SAINT MARY'S RIVER

AS the Admiral passed from Lake St. Clair through the St. Clair flats, the boys beheld with interest and wonder the colony of cottages and hotels built on the very water's edge of the American side, with the scores of launches scudding hither and thither, carrying merry vacationists on visits to friends or to fishing grounds. On the Canadian side, however, they could see nothing but a vast expanse of reeds and water-grass, splendid for duck shooting but otherwise useless.

"How do the people get here? Aren't there any roads?" asked Ted, as he looked in vain for some means of connection with the mainland.

"To be sure," replied the skipper, whose customary geniality had been restored by the receipt of a wireless message ordering him to set the unwelcome guards ashore at the Soo, as the Sault St. Claire is nicknamed.

"Where are they? I can't see any," returned the boy.

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"You notice those lanes of water, don't you?" and Captain Perkins pointed to a series of courses, some twelve feet wide, which traversed the flats at intervals of two or three hundred feet.

"Yes."

"Well, those are the streets."

"Oh, I mean regular dirt streets," protested Ted.

"There aren't any. Unless you come by launch or some of the big passenger boats that ply between the summer settlements and Detroit, you can't get within ten miles of the colony here."

At this statement the young homesteaders looked with increased interest at the novel settlement, and Ted began:

"Why, it's a regular —"

"Don't say it," interrupted the skipper; "there's a fine of five dollars, if you do."

"Say what?" demanded the boy. "How do you know what I was going to say?"

"Because they all do. We sailors have become so tired of hearing guests call this colony 'an American Venice' that we have established a fine against the expression."

"Much obliged for saving me the money,"



smiled Ted. "But it is a wonderful sight for a person who has never seen it."

"I suppose so. It's the bane of all ore carriers, however. The people in the launches persist in crossing our bows and darting in and out, until it gives our wheelmen a nervous fit trying to avoid running them down."

The Admiral, however, passed the colony without accident and was soon in the St. Clair River, whence she passed into Lake Huron, where it was again plain sailing till the St. Mary's River was reached.

"M'm, what a delicious odour! Smell it, Ted?" exclaimed Phil, as he sniffed the twilight air, while the big carrier checked speed and passed between the lights marking the channel.

"That is from the pine forests," explained Captain Perkins. "You are fortunate to get the pure fragrance. Later in the season there are usually fires raging, either in Michigan or Canadian forests, making the air stifling with smoke. I've seen it so dense that we were obliged to barely creep along, and blow our whistles just as in a fog."

The handling of the six-hundred-foot vessel as she steamed up the Detroit River had filled the boys with wonder, but as she made the sharp

turns in the St. Mary's, now being obliged to clear a government dredge at work in the channel, now running so close to the shore that it seemed they could jump from the bridge to land, they were amazed at the ease and skill with which the big carrier was navigated.

"Mr. Adams, Mr. Adams!" shouted the skipper. And as the mate hurried from the pilot house, he added: "See if you can pick up a spar-buoy, off the port bow."

Intently the officer peered through the fast-increasing darkness for a sight of the red light.

"Can't see it, sir," he replied.

"Then heave the lead, quick! If the light is out of commission, we may ground before we can make this turn."

Ere the last words were uttered, the mate had stepped onto a plank projecting from the bridge, picked up a long line to which bits of red and white bunting were alternately attached at regular intervals, with a slug of lead at the end, and, with a preliminary swing, shot it into the water well toward the bow of the boat, then hauled it aboard rapidly as the vessel came abreast of him.

"Three fathoms and a foot!" he cried.

"Starboard your helm, hard over!" roared

the captain, springing toward the opening which communicated with the wheelsman in the pilot house below.

"Starboard your helm, hard over!" repeated the wheelsman, in accordance with ship's custom.

Again the first mate heaved the lead.

"Three fathoms, lacking two inches!" he called.

"Hold your helm hard over!" snapped the skipper, and, as the repetition came to him, he pressed a button for full speed astern.

As the electricity carried the command to the indicator in the engine room, the terrific churning of the water as the propellers whirled in reversed motion broke the stillness of the evening air, the boat quivered, then began to back.

"Three fathoms and seven inches," announced the mate.

"Close work," muttered Captain Perkins to himself, as he pressed another button for quarter speed ahead.

Farther and farther the Admiral's bow swung to starboard as the wheelsman held the wheel over hard, and the mate's next announcement of three fathoms and a half told them that the boat was once again in the channel.

"Stern will go over a buoy," warned Mr.

Adams, as he glanced back before returning to the bridge.

“Hard aport!” commanded the skipper, stepping to a spot whence he could watch the light on the spar-buoy aft.

“Hard aport!” came the confirmation.

“Three fathoms, lacking an inch!” called the mate, who, in view of the danger of grounding astern, was again heaving the lead.

“Starboard, three points!” yelled the captain, adding to himself, “Plague take that current, it’s liable to drive me on yet.”

With a quickness that was remarkable, considering her size, the Admiral responded to her tiller, and again her nose swung away from the shore of the channel.

As he noted the fact, the skipper once more called for full speed, but this time ahead.

“They can fine me for exceeding the speed limit for this river if they want to, but I’m not going to run the danger of swinging across the channel, bow and stern on, just for lack of a little speed,” he declared.

No further manœuvring was necessary, however, to negotiate the surprisingly sharp turn, and when he was clear, the skipper checked his speed.



"What are those things along the Michigan side, Captain? They look like cabins. I've noticed several of them," said Phil, pointing to dark masses that stood out from the rest of the shore line.

"Indian shacks."

"Indians here? What do they do?" exclaimed Ted.

"Pick blueberries, fish and sell them and the things they weave to the tourists at the Soo."

"I wish it was daylight so that we could see them. Just think, real Indians, Phil!"

"Oh, you'll have a chance to see enough of them at the canal," smiled the skipper.

"But they don't go into the town, do they? I should think they would scare the women and children to death."

"They not only go into the Soo, but they bother the life out of people trying to sell their wares. The quickest way to get rid of them is to buy something. Children don't even notice them, unless to make fun of them. But you mustn't expect to see story-book Indians, in war paint, feathers, and blankets. They have taken to trousers and shirts."

The disappointment which settled on Ted's

face at this shattering of his mental picture of the redmen caused the skipper to add with a smile:

"You can still get a thrill from them, though, if we are held up at the canal, by getting one to shoot the St. Mary's rapids with you."

"Provided you can find one sober enough," supplemented the first mate.

"Oh, I hope so," declared the younger boy. "Do they shoot the rapids in canoes or boats?"

"In canoes. You can't get an Indian into a boat without a derrick, too much work to row one."

The guidance of the big carrier again claiming the captain's attention, the boys, their minds filled with redskins, descended to the deck, where they sought out some of the crew, who regaled them with experiences, some very fanciful, they had had with the redmen.

"Get to your posts, you huskies! Watchman, call the other watch!" snapped Hansen, coming up to the group. "You boys better go to the bridge if you want to see how we lock a ship through the canal—and you'll be out of the way there," he added to himself, as the sailors obeyed. For when an ore carrier docks or goes through the canal, all the crew are called on

duty, regardless of whether it is their watch on or off.

“Are we at the Soo now?” asked Phil.

“Will be in about ten minutes. See those lights ahead? The ones on the right are in the Canadian town. Some difference between that glim and the one on our side, to the left, what?”

“I should say so, but what are all those red, green, and white lights just ahead of us?” asked Ted, as they mounted to the bridge.

“Boats waiting to lock through,” replied the first mate.

“Which means you will get your chance to shoot the rapids all right,” observed the captain.

“We shall be lucky if we get through before noon, there are so many ahead of us. Mr. Adams, when you find a good berth, let the anchors go.”

## CHAPTER XII

### SHOOTING THE RAPIDS

FOR a long time the boys remained on the bridge, fascinated by the scene presented by the illumination of the American and Canadian cities and the vari-coloured lights on the boats, heightened by the occasional shout of a skipper or mate as one of his crew failed to handle a line properly.

Of the chief officers on the Admiral, the second mate alone was on the bridge.

“Do you think we shall get through tonight?” inquired Ted, eager for anybody’s opinion.

“We may and we may not,” returned Hansel, non-committally.

“Captain Perkins said we wouldn’t.”

“Skippers don’t know *all* there is to know.”

“Then let’s stay up all night, Phil. I wouldn’t miss seeing the Admiral locked through the canal for anything.”

As his brother shared Ted’s interest, the boys brought rocking-chairs and blankets from their



cabin and made themselves comfortable on the bridge.

The novelty and excitement of the night scene, however, failed to withstand the gentle, sleep-bearing air, and when Captain Perkins emerged from his cabin about three o'clock, to see whether or not it was worth while to move the Admiral closer to the canal, he found them slumbering.

"Better go to your beds," he said, as the young homesteaders awoke in response to his shaking.

"But we want to see you lock through," explained Phil, drowsily.

"I told you we'd be lucky if we got into Superior before noon, didn't I?"

"Yes," assented the boys.

"Then why are you sitting up?"

"Mr. Hansen," began Ted.

"Bother Hansen! He's second mate and I'm captain, what?"

Again the young homesteaders assented.

"Well, if he'd had as much experience as I have, he'd be sailing a boat of his own instead of being my second mate. But if you want to sit up, all right."

"You'll have us called if you do move?" appealed Ted.

“Sure thing.”

“Bed’s certainly more comfortable than this chair, Phil;” and picking up their things, the boys made their way below to their cabin.

Scarcely had they gone to sleep again, it seemed to them, than they heard the voice of the first mate calling:

“We’re moving up to the canal. If you don’t look sharp, you’ll miss your chance to shoot the rapids.”

Expressing their thanks, Phil and Ted almost jumped into their clothes and were soon on the bridge, staring in open-mouthed wonder all about them.

To the right they beheld the quaint buildings of the Canadian Soo and the monster pulp works, but the foam of the rapids, as the water raced down the twenty-foot fall from Lake Superior, almost a mile to the level of Lake Huron, quickly claimed and long kept their attention.

In front of them were the two American canals, one now useless because of the increased size of the lake carriers, with their locks and the massive granite power-house, while work trains and dredges puffed and snorted and a thousand men worked to remove the dirt from the course of still another canal which was to have even

longer locks. And back of the canals, on the left, extended the steadily growing city of the American Sault Ste. Marie. Far in the distance, to the right, they could see the Canadian canal, yet not a boat was waiting to use it.

But it was the rapids at which they were looking when the watchman, in passing, whispered:

“Just keep your eye on the skipper if you want to see some boat jockeying.”

Even as the words were uttered, there sounded a series of ear-splitting toots, seemingly abreast of them.

In response, the Admiral emitted a single, strident blast, Captain Perkins snapped some orders to his wheelsman, and the huge ore carrier swung on a diagonal course, making, under full speed, for a vacant place at the dock adjoining the canal abutments.

The manoeuvre successfully blocked other carriers, on both sides of the Admiral, which had sought to reach the coveted berth before her, and they slackened speed when their skippers realized they had not been able to steal a march on Captain Perkins.

“Pretty work,” grinned the mate, as he turned to his superior, “but hadn’t you better check? Some inspector may see us and fine you.”

In reply, the skipper pressed a button and the speed of the boat fell away, her momentum carrying her to the dock, where she was made fast, pending her turn to lock through.

"Come ashore with me and we'll see what your chances are for a trip down the rapids," called the captain, stepping from the bridge to the canal wall.

Quickly the boys followed, and soon they were in the canal-master's room at the power-house.

"Some day I'll have to fine you, Perkins, for jockeying for dock position," chuckled the master, as he shook the hand of the Admiral's skipper. "I was watching and I thought those other fellows had caught you napping for once."

Captain Perkins' only reply was a grin, as he asked:

"How long before we can go up?"

"Just look over on Superior," returned the canal-master.

And as they all turned, the boys beheld more than a score of boats waiting to lock through.

"You're not going to hold me until all those fellows are down?" asked the Admiral's skipper.

"I ought to, but seeing it's you, I'll let you up after I've passed half of them."

"That means two hours, anyhow."



"More likely three; they are all big ones, so we can only take one at a time."

"H'm! I suppose I must be thankful you don't hold me for the twenty. Seen Afraid-of-his-wife this morning? I want him to take these friends of mine down the rapids."

"No — hold on, here he comes," added the canal-master, peering from his window toward the American side.

"We're in luck all around," smiled the skipper, as, having thanked the master, he led the boys along the park-like reservation surrounding the canals.

His companions gave him no heed, however, their attention being engrossed by the tall, bronze-faced man, clad in trousers and coat fully a dozen sizes too big for him, who was approaching.

"Howde, chief," greeted the skipper. "I want you to take these boys down the rapids."

"Five dollar," grunted the redskin, after eying his prospective passengers for several moments.

"If I were chief of police, I'd arrest you for a robber," returned Captain Perkins. "You'll get two dollars."

"All right."

“If you capsize, you won’t get a cent and I’ll take it out of your hide.”

A grin of understanding was the Indian’s reply, and, nodding to the boys, he started toward the Superior end of the canal.

“Meet you here at the power-house,” said the skipper, as Phil and Ted hurried after the red-man.

Arrived at an inlet on the lake, the Indian shoved a twenty-foot birch-bark canoe off the beach and held it while the boys got in.

“You here,” he grunted, motioning Ted to a seat in the bow. “You here;” and he put Phil amidships. “No move. Sit still. Heap easy tip over. No move, un’erstan’?”

“We do,” chorused his passengers.

Taking his paddle, Afraid-of-his-wife kneeled down in the stern, and with a few powerful strokes sent the canoe out onto the lake and then turned it toward the foaming, roaring rapids.

As the frail craft was caught in the current and raced toward the raging torrent, the boys instinctively grabbed the gunwales.

“No move!” cried the Indian.

Ere his passengers could answer, the canoe leaped over the fall, into the seething waters of the rapids.

With tense lips and wide eyes the boys gazed at the merciless, sharp-pointed rocks whose presence lashed the river into foam. So many were there that it seemed impossible the canoe could be guided in and out among them, and when a shower of spray drenched them, after a long leap, they screamed.

"No move!" shrieked the Indian, his shrill command audible even above the roar of the rapids.

As they leaped, seemingly from white crest to white crest without mishap, the courage of the young passengers returned, and looking back, they beheld the redman, kneeling on a crossbar, his face stolid, his eyes keenly alert, only the play of his splendid arm muscles, as he deftly turned his paddle, indicating that he was alive.

Confidence established in his ability, Phil and Ted yelled in pure delight as they raced along at express-train speed, and when, with a final leap, they shot into calm water, their one regret was that the rapids were not longer.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THROUGH ONTO SUPERIOR

**I** WONDER if we have time to shoot the rapids again," exclaimed Ted, his blood a-tingle from the thrill of the dash through the swirling foam, as the three of them walked up to the canal, the Indian towing his canoe. "How much would you do it for, Chief?"

The boy had first thought to call the redman by his name, then, remembering that Captain Perkins had avoided its use, he had employed the latter's mode of address.

"Same price, two dollar," grunted Afraid-of-his-wife.

"You certainly are a robber," laughed Phil. "The second time is always cheaper, you know."

"Huh, you Yankee. Injun know. Yankee heap stingy. Help carry canoe back, one dollar," declared the redskin, while the boys roared, both at his characterization of a Yankee and at his shrewdness in obtaining assistance for the "carry" of more than a mile.



“What do you say, Phil, is it a go, or don’t you think we can afford it?”

“I guess we can stand the expense, Ted, but we’d better wait before making any bargain until we see how much time we have.”

The hurried approach of one of the Admiral’s deck hands settled the matter, however.

“We’ve got a chance to lock through right now, and the skipper said you was to get a move on,” panted the sailor.

“All right. Sorry, Chief, that we can’t help you tote your canoe back,” said Phil, handing the redman his fee.

The Indian made no comment, however, simply pocketed his money, and then sprang into his canoe, which he paddled vigorously toward the lock.

“Where’s he going?” inquired Ted, as they broke into a trot.

“To get into the lock and go through with us,” replied the sailor. “No ‘carrying’ for him. Why, I’ve seen a redskin wait half a day for a chance to lock through rather than tote his canoe the mile.”

“I’ve always heard Indians were lazy,” commented Ted.

“Only one thing lazier and that’s a New Or-

leans roustabout. I've seen the time down there when the shippers wanted to load cotton quick and offered those niggers double wages, yet they wouldn't lift a finger 'count of its being Sunday."

As the three came within hailing distance of the Admiral, Captain Perkins ordered them to hurry.

Already men were dragging her hawsers toward the spiles and cleats for the first lock, and, jumping aboard, Phil and Ted hastened to the bridge.

"If there's a twenty-foot fall between Lake Superior and Lake Huron, how in the world do we get up it?" asked the younger boy.

"Wait and see, don't bother anybody with questions now," quickly admonished his brother, in a low voice.

And the warning was timely, for if there is one occasion more than another on an ore carrier when officers and crew are busy, it is when they are locking through the canal.

The second mate takes charge of the stern, giving orders to the men at the lines both on shore and on the boat; the first mate renders similar service at the bow, and the captain gives instructions to both, regulates the speed of the vessel as she enters the locks, that she may not

ram the lock gates and thus put the entire canal out of commission, at the same time taking care not to scrape or jam the plates against the side of the canal — no trifling task with a boat whose beam is only a couple of feet less than the width of the lock.

At last the Admiral was in position, held fast bow and stern by hawsers running to each side of the canal.

“I don’t see anything happening yet,” observed Ted, in disappointment, peering ahead intently.

“Just look astern and you will,” replied the captain.

Quickly both boys faced about and beheld several canal officials on the bridges above the gates, which were slowly swinging shut. When at last they were closed, the men turned the freight-car-brake like wheels which regulate the sluices and dropped the bolts into place.

“Now turn around and look ahead again,” instructed the skipper.

On the bow lock another set of men were busy at the wheels, and as they raised the sluices, water began to bubble and foam at the bottom of the gates.

Soon the big carrier commenced to strain

at her moorings, her hawsers creaking and groaning.

"Why, the boat is rising," exclaimed Ted, excitedly.

The skipper was giving his attention to his boat again, and the boy's comment was lost in the shouts of "Ease off a bit, bow! Ease off, stern!" that were yelled at the line-tenders on the carrier.

Greater and greater became the volume of water rushing into the lock as the gates were opened wider, and when they were full open, the Admiral rode ten feet higher.

"Cast loose," commanded Captain Perkins. When the line-tenders ashore had received the word from the mates and obeyed, he pressed the button for going ahead and the huge boat crept into the second lock.

The action was repeated in this, and when the lock was filled, the Admiral was on the level of Lake Superior and steamed on her course, her line-tenders scrambling aboard as best they could, for it is the law of the lakes that they must look out for themselves and not depend on a skipper's waiting for them.

Heaving lines and hawsers properly coiled and the log set, the crew settled down to their routine,



thankful for the days ahead of them of straight sailing.

In the best of humour because he had been locked through the canal without waiting for the passage of the entire down-bound fleet that had been anchored at the Superior mouth of the canal, Captain Perkins told the boys to bring their chairs to the bridge and pointed out the points of interest on the fast-receding shores.

"Where going?" he asked, as Phil arose and started to leave the bridge.

"To the galley, to get a drink of ice water."

"Just step into the pilot house, take the pail and line, and heave her over."

"But I want ice water, sir."

"And you'll get it. On the hottest day of summer the water in Superior is always cold, practically ice-cold."

Skeptical, Phil obeyed, but when he raised the water to his lips, he found that the captain was right.

"What makes it so cold?"

"That is the question no one has yet answered satisfactorily. Superior is a queer lake. There is less known about it and it is more feared than any of the Great Lakes, even than Erie, where terrific storms come up in a twinkling. You've

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found how cold the water is, and if you'll look over the side, you will notice that it is green, while the water in the other lakes is blue. They say that no body which was drowned in Superior has ever come to the surface, and, you know, in ordinary water a dead body will rise in time."

"Is that the reason the lake is so feared?" inquired Ted.

"Partly. The storms, when we do get them, are terrible. But the worst thing is the fog — it comes as suddenly as the big winds on Erie. See that light-house off the port bow?" And the skipper pointed to a column, painted white with a red pinnacle, which was just visible on the end of a barren promontory. "Well, that's White Fish Point Light-house, and there is nothing but white sand and scrub pine for miles in any shore direction. About thirty miles southwest of the light-house is an uncharted reef, at least it was uncharted five years ago, and that's the time I'm going to tell you about.

"I was bound down on the Queen, a little two-hundred-and-fifty-foot tub, loaded with every ounce of copper we dared put in her. It was early in December — owners took chances then running later into the winter that they don't take now — and it was bitter cold.

“Masts, cabins, deck, and rails were coated with ice, but the day broke clear, after a misty snow. I was crowding the old tub because I knew if the cold held, I’d be ice-bound at the Soo and unable to get through.

“Suddenly, along near the middle of the forenoon, a fog settled down on us, almost before you could say the words. I slackened speed a trifle, but not much, because I was afraid of ice. For three hours we plugged along, blowing our fog-horn and holding our course, as we thought.

“All at once there sounded a series of reports, short and sharp, as though somebody was exploding several sticks of dynamite, one at a time. I knew quick enough we’d grounded, but before my first mate or I could speak, there came a long, grating sound and the old tub began to settle.

“I tell you, it didn’t take us long to get into my cutter, the crew only numbered twenty all told, and pull away from the Queen. We hadn’t gone more than nine or ten fathoms when the old tub went down.

“Well, the fog still held and we knew we were off our course, but we rowed and we rowed and we rowed. It seemed as though it grew

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colder every minute, and after we'd rowed about six hours, the men's hands and feet began to freeze. But we kept at it.

"Some of the men began to whine that we were rowing straight out into the lake, and when darkness came, with no shore in sight, I admit I lost heart. However, I didn't let my men know it, and just nine hours after we took to the cutter, we caught the flash from old White Fish — and perhaps it didn't look good! The next day, we got word to the Soo and a tug was sent for us."

"What became of the Queen?" asked Phil, when a long pause announced that the captain had finished his story.

"You saw that boat to which I tooted three times as we passed out of the canal? Well, that is the Queen. The next summer, divers found she was only in some thirty feet of water. Her cargo, what there was left, was lightered; she was raised, dry-docked, fitted with new plates, and the first mate who was with me then is now her master."



## CHAPTER XIV

### A NIGHT IN THE FOG

“**W**HAT’S that?” cried Ted, sitting up in bed, his mind too dulled by sleep to identify the sound that had awakened him so suddenly.

“What’s what?” growled his brother, who had been aroused by Ted’s cry.

“That noise I heard?”

“Noise nothing! Go to sleep! You were dreaming.”

“But I tell you I heard something. Why, it —”

His words were interrupted, however, by the ear-splitting screech of the Admiral’s siren.

“There! What did I tell you?” gloated the younger boy. “I knew —”

But again his words were silenced by another shrill whistle.

A veritable roar replied from the Admiral’s siren.

Reaching quickly above his head, Phil switched on the electric lights in the cabin, and the boys

stared at one another as a still different-toned whistle joined in the pandemonium.

“Fog!” they gasped, almost in the same breath. And even as they uttered the word, they sprang to the floor, their minds recalling the statement of Captain Perkins in regard to the danger from the palls of mist.

Never another word did either of them speak as they got into their clothes with a rapidity that would have established a record for quick-dressing, had any one been present to time them.

Still silent, they rushed to the door and threw it open, then paused. Not a yard could they see ahead of them.

The screech of the Admiral’s siren seemed continuous, interrupted incessantly by other whistles, while apparently from all about them, so does a Superior fog distort all sense of direction, came hails, some loud, others faint, in accordance with the distance of their utterers, “Don’t see a thing!” from the lookouts on the carriers.

“Let’s go to the bridge,” whispered Phil, in an awed tone.

“But we may lose our way — and fall overboard. You know what Captain Perkins said about bodies — ”

“Forget that,” cut in the elder boy. “Just

take hold of my arm. I'll keep one hand on the cabin. Come on."

As they gained the bridge, the young passengers were just able to distinguish half a dozen forms.

"See anything?" queried the skipper's voice, its tone indicating the tension under which he was, as there came an instant's lull in the riot of siren screeches and whistles.

"Thought I saw something off the port bow a minute ago," responded a voice which neither of the boys could identify, then it added: "But I can't see it now."

"How about lying to?" suggested the first mate.

"Don't dare to," replied the captain. "Those other boats are so close, I've simply got to have steerage way. She's checked to quarter speed now."

"Wireless! Wireless!" shouted another voice. "The Prescott wants to know our course and position. She's East by North, half East, off Moose Point."

"At the wheel, there! What's our course?" demanded the skipper.

"North by East, half North," answered the wheelsman.

"Same course," snapped Captain Perkins. "Mr. Adams, where do you think we are?"

When word of the request had been announced, the first mate had darted below to the pilot house and was scanning the log-book.

"According to our speed and the last bearing entered, we ought to be off Moose Point," he called to the skipper.

"Tell the Prescott we are on the same course and in practically the same position she is. Tell her to swing a point East and I'll swing a point North. Get that?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied the wireless operator.

Scarcely had the instruments begun to crash out their message than there rose a terrified shout:

"Boat ahoy, sir! Right off the port bow!"

"Hard astarboard! Hard astarboard!" bel-  
lowed Captain Perkins to his wheelsman, while he sprang to his buttons and frantically signalled for full speed astern.

And even as he spoke, there loomed a towering, fog-magnified mass, seemingly right upon them.

The lookouts on the Prescott had spied the Admiral only a few seconds after the latter's, and while Captain Perkins was giving his orders,



a frenzied ringing of bells proved that her skipper was also doing his utmost to avert the collision which meant the foundering of both boats, because they were loaded, his vessel being older and not equipped with the modern system for signalling the engine room.

Though both carriers had been creeping through the fog with barely steerage way, it seemed to the anxious groups on each that they were racing together at express-train speed. But the reversed propellers of the Admiral were doing their work, the boat checked with a suddenness that sent the boys and some of the crew sprawling on the bridge, quivered and then began to back, the bow swinging away from the Prescott.

“Port your wheel, hard over!” ordered Captain Perkins, as his boat moved astern.

Still the Prescott came on, then her propellers bit, and she, too, checked, but not before her nose was where the huge carrier’s had been scarce a moment before.

Farther and farther to the right swung the bow of the Admiral, while the Prescott began to swerve to the left, and the danger was over.

“Great work, Perkins! You’ve saved our

lives!” megaphoned the other carrier’s skipper as she passed on.

“Too close! I don’t want any more like —” began Captain Perkins, when there came frenzied shouts from the Admiral’s stern, which were quickly passed by the crew on deck, acting as lookouts, to the bridge: “Boat ahoy! Off the starboard stern!”

“Take the bridge, Mr. Adams,” exclaimed the skipper, ordering full speed ahead. “Keep your eyes open in front!” and he hurried to the deck.

“Wireless, sir! Prescott wants to know if she shall stand by?” called the operator.

“Tell her ‘yes’!” shouted back Captain Perkins, as he ran aft, where he quickly mounted the superstructure, the better to see, having instructed Hansen to station men to pass his orders to the chief in the engine room.

The other boat, however, had heard the cries and located the Admiral, thus averting the danger of collision by a wider margin than in the case of the Prescott.

But the shouts and exchange of hails had carried far through the fog, and again whistles and sirens screeched in all directions.

When a lull came, the Admiral’s skipper

raised to his lips the megaphone he had carried from the bridge.

“Ahoy, astern! Who are you?” he demanded.

“Palmer,” came the answer. “We picked up your wireless, Admiral. There are boats all around us. How are we going to get out of this tangle?”

“I’m going to wireless everybody within fifteen miles to check and just keep steerage way.”

“Reckon that’s the safest thing, but all the boats haven’t wireless.”

“We’ll have to watch out for those that haven’t. Bring the Palmer close to my stern and swing to right angles. I’ll hold the Prescott off my bow. The three of us can protect each other.”

“Right-o!” exclaimed the captain of the Palmer, and Mr. Perkins hastened to the bridge, where he quickly gave instructions to his operator, adding: “Tell each boat to answer, and that I’ll report her to the Association if she refuses.”

For five minutes the man at the wireless instruments sent out the code call for the attention of the other boats, then flashed the captain’s orders through the fog. Twice he repeated them, then waited for replies.

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One by one they came in and were reported to the skipper.

"The Wolcott wants to know how she can protect herself from other boats bound down behind her, if she checks," announced the operator.

"Tell her to send out her position when we have finished."

For some time there was silence, then Captain Perkins called:

"How many answers have you received?"

"Eighteen, sir."

"That ought to give you boys an idea of the danger in a Superior fog," commented the skipper, turning to his young passengers. "With twenty-one boats within fifteen miles, counting the Palmer, Prescott and ourselves, and nobody knows how many others that haven't any wireless, there are plenty of chances for collisions."

"Why, it's three o'clock," exclaimed Phil, looking at his watch. "What time did the fog set in?"

"Fifteen minutes past twelve," returned the first mate.

"How long will it last?"

"Goodness knows," sighed the skipper. "I've seen them set in and lift inside an hour and I've



seen 'em hold three days. Your opinion is as good as mine."

"Will all these boats be drifting for three days, if the fog holds that long?" asked Ted.

"Unless we can arrange some plan to keep out of the way of one another. Only there are more likely to be sixty than twenty-one boats floating about if the fog holds that long."

Too careful a navigator to turn over his vessel to the mate when his judgment and nerve might be needed at any moment to meet an emergency, Captain Perkins went into the pilot house, where he regaled the boys with stories of other fogs.

"It's lifting! It's lifting!" suddenly shouted a voice, joyfully.

Quickly the skipper was on his bridge, followed by Phil and Ted.

In the East a pink glow suffused the mist pall, before which the fog receded. As dawn burst, the colour effect was gorgeous, and when the sun seemingly leaped from the lake, the fog vanished as if by magic.

In amazement, the young homesteaders looked about them. The water was apparently alive with boats as far as they could see in all directions.

## CHAPTER XV

### ENTRAINED

“**H**OW much danger was there, Captain Perkins, of our sinking if we had collided with the Prescott?” inquired Phil, when they met at dinner, all hands, save the watch on duty, having refreshed themselves with sleep after the terrible strain of the night.

“That’s hard to tell. Last summer two carriers, bound down with copper ore, collided, and both sank so quickly not a single man jack of them was able to save himself. Still, we should have stood a better chance than the Prescott, because she’s full of ore.”

“But we carry thirteen thousand tons of coal, and thirteen thousand tons is thirteen thousand tons,” interposed Ted.

“Raked that up again, eh?” smiled the captain. “You’re quite right, but you must remember that soft coal is porous and has a certain amount of buoyancy, enough, perhaps, to have kept our boat afloat until we could patch her

up or clear our cutters, but there's nothing I know sinks faster than crude copper ore."

"Don't you think the others could have —"

"Oh, let up, Ted!" exclaimed his brother. "We didn't have any collision, thanks to Captain Perkins, so let's not suppose cases."

"I was only going to ask how long it took to launch the cutters. I'd like to know, and I'd also like to know what to do and how to do it at such a time. If anything had happened last night, I should have had no idea where to go."

Phil's retort was prevented by the skipper.

"It's always well to be prepared for emergencies, Ted. Mr. Adams, go to the bridge and give the signal to 'abandon ship.' I should like to see how quickly my crew can do the trick."

As the whistle shrieked the dread signal, coal-passers, firemen, oilers, and deck hands alike looked at one another in amazement, then dashed to the posts assigned them — some at the boat falls, others whisking off the canvas covers, while still others sprang into the boats to prevent the ropes from fouling as they were lowered into the water.

Watch in hand, Captain Perkins stood on the bridge looking aft.

"Starboard cutter, two minutes, ten seconds,"

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he announced through his megaphone. "Good work, boys!"

The other boats were in the water in less than four minutes, and the skipper was delighted with the result of the test.

"We must have our drills more often after this, Mr. Adams," he said; then turning to Ted, he asked:

"Should you know what to do now?"

"Y-e-s, that is, I think so, if I knew which boat to go to."

"If anything happens, which I hope there won't, you boys make for the starboard cutter as fast as your legs can carry you."

The remaining days before they sighted the harbour of Duluth were uneventful, the young homesteaders enjoying to the full the sensation of being for so many hours out of sight of land.

It was morning when the carrier entered the Duluth breakwater, and the boys gazed in wonder at the panorama. On the left was the port of Superior, where a score of boats were receiving and discharging cargoes, but it was the grain elevators of Duluth pouring their tons of wheat into several vessels that claimed the greatest share of attention, and Phil and Ted listened with interest to the statistics concerning the stupen-



dous amount of grain and iron ore, totalling millions of tons, shipped annually from the "city at the head of the lakes."

When the Admiral was finally docked, it was with real regret that Phil and Ted bade good-bye to the mates, after thanking them for their kindness and patience, and turned toward Captain Perkins.

"I'm going ashore with you," he smiled. "My instructions from Mr. Atwood were not to leave you until you were safely on board your train for the West."

Phil, because of his nineteen years, felt that such guardianship was not only unnecessary but humiliating and he was on the point of rejecting the skipper's escort, when Ted quickly exclaimed:

"That will be bully. Not that we need a guardian — we're old enough to take care of ourselves — but it will be pleasant to have some one we know with us. Can't Mr. Adams go too?"

The boy's words were so cordial that the skipper smiled at the token of appreciation, while Phil was very glad that he had been prevented from saying what he had intended.

"That was just what I wanted to suggest,"

declared Captain Perkins. "Come on, Harry; it's Harry any time except on board ship, you know — we must treat these boys right in Duluth. Some day we may want to beg enough wheat from them to make a couple of barrels of flour, if things keep on as they are going."

"You shall have it and welcome, and all you want of it," declared Phil, glad of the opportunity to atone for his former rudeness.

"By Jove! Just think! Perhaps some day you'll carry some of our wheat in the Admiral!" exclaimed Ted. Then, turning to the vessel, he said, whimsically: "Good-bye, old boat. If you ever carry any of my grain, don't you dare to sink with it."

After a call at the bank, where the money needed for their railroad tickets, berths, meals, and incidentals was drawn against their letter of credit, the young homesteaders purchased their transportation. These matters attended to, they had nothing else to occupy them until evening, and glad, indeed, were they of the companionship of the captain and mate.

Having, for reasons of economy, elected to travel in a "tourist car," which in reality differs from the more expensive sleeping-cars only in finishings and furnishings, Phil and Ted, after

bidding their friends good-bye, set about arranging their luggage and making themselves comfortable for the fifteen-hundred-mile journey.

Every section in the car was taken by people who, like themselves, were going West to new homes or to visit friends, and from time to time the boys stole glances at them.

"They look decent enough," whispered Phil, in surprise.

"Why shouldn't they?" demanded his brother. "Just because people choose to travel in a tourist car to save a few dollars — and not so few at that — is no reason why they are not decent. Right here is where I am going to tell you something, and I don't want you to get angry."

"'Out of the mouths of babes!'" began Phil.

"You can't stop me."

"Then why don't you begin?"

"I'm afraid you won't like it."

"I expect to find a lot of things in the next few months that I won't like, so fire away."

"It's this. You're a bit of a snob. Now don't interrupt. You know as well as I do that if I hadn't prevented you, you would have given Captain Perkins a snub when he said he was going ashore with us, and after all his patience with and kindness to us."

“What’s the use of throwing that at me?” snapped his brother, his face crimsoning. “He isn’t with us now, is he?”

“No. But you were just as snobbish when you said these people in the car were ‘decent.’ You know as well as I do that if we are going to succeed at Chikau, or wherever we settle, you must get over it. The people out in Washington are every bit as good as we are. You can’t judge a Westerner by his clothes or his talk. A man may look like a tramp and work in the fields with his men and yet be worth no end of money. Hustle all the time, early and late, is the custom out there. And there’s no taint to mixing with the help and working with your hands out West, as there is in the East. Westerners take a man for what he is, not what his family are, or ancestors were. Most of the successful men out there went out penniless, like ourselves, and they have no use for snobs.”

“I didn’t know you’d been out West. Where did you get your information?” sneered Phil, angry at the reproof, and all the more because, in his heart, he realized it was merited.

“I knew you’d get mad, but I don’t care. Dr. Blair told me to talk to you.”

At this statement the elder boy sat up straight.



“When?” he demanded.

“You know that letter I received at Detroit and wouldn’t show you? Well, it was in that.”

Surprised and mortified by this information, Phil sat in silence, subjecting himself to a searching self-examination. And neither boy noticed a kindly old gentleman, seated across the aisle from them, who nodded approvingly at Ted.

As the best all-round athlete in his school, Phil had been looked up to and, in some cases, worshipped by his mates. Because he was young, this had given him an undue appreciation of himself. But it was a shock to him to learn that Dr. Blair had noticed the fact and that his manner of superiority was so evident that the physician felt called upon to warn him against it.

“Did Blair say anything else?” he asked, finally, of the brother who had been covertly watching the effect of his verbal chastisement.

“Yes.”

“Then let’s hear it.”

“He said we must remember that we know absolutely nothing about farming, or the life out West and that we would need all the friends we could make. Then he quoted that line about having a thousand friends but never a friend to spare, and said he wished me to tell you what

he had written, so that you would not spoil our chances of success, on Momsy's account."

"Phew! Did he put it as strongly as that? Let me see the letter."

"You wouldn't like to read it. I — I've toned it down a bit, but I've given the substance of it."

Phil, however, was insistent, and at last, though with evident reluctance, his brother handed over the letter.

Twice and yet a third time the former baseball captain read the caustic criticisms of himself.

"Was I really such a cad as Blair makes out, Ted?"

"Well, you were Parker's star athlete, you know, and for that reason people overlooked a lot of things," temporized his brother.

"Wow! Then I guess I was. But I won't be any more. Much obliged, son, for opening my eyes. Let's shake on it."

"Not unless you stop 'sonning' me. That's too condescending. It's as easy to say Ted as 'son.'"

"All right, Ted. Shake. And now to prove that I've waked up to myself, I am going to help that woman ahead, the one with the baby, open her window."

## CHAPTER XVI

### A NIGHT ALARM

“**I**T’S only six o’clock. Go back to sleep, you’ll wake everybody in the car,” exclaimed Phil, aroused from his slumbers by his brother’s contortions as he dressed in their cramped section.

“I won’t if you stop talking. Besides, I want to see as much of the country through which we are passing as I can.”

The prospect of new scenes interested the elder boy, and he, too, began to dress.

“Instead of being the first ones up, we’re the last ones,” announced Ted, withdrawing his head through the section curtains, after a look up and down the car.

Such was, indeed, the fact, and as they emerged from their compartment, they were greeted by the grey-haired man opposite.

“I’ve heard some of your conversation,” he smiled. “If you’re going to be successful farmers, you’ll have to get up earlier than this. I’ve been a farmer all my life, and there isn’t a

time I can remember, since I was big enough to carry a pail, that I wasn't up at four-thirty, summer or winter."

"But what did you do? You couldn't begin to farm so early," returned Ted.

"Chores," answered the man. "Cows must be fed before they are milked and the other stock must be attended to. The earlier a man gets his chores done, the more time he can give to his farm. I've no patience with these fellows who don't get through with their chores till the middle of the forenoon."

"But you didn't have any cows to milk this morning. I should think you would have indulged in the luxury of a late sleep," laughed Phil.

"I just couldn't. It was four-fifteen when I looked at my watch and I grew so fidgety I had to get up. Marthy, can't you give these young gentlemen some of your good coffee?"

Turning, the boys beheld a plump little woman, from whose face and eyes kindness and good nature radiated, hurrying down the aisle with a steaming coffee-pot in her hand.

"To be sure, I can, Silas." Then, beaming on the young homesteaders, she said:

"Just bring your cups. After I'd made it,



I knew there was more'n twice as much as Silas and I could drink."

"We haven't any cups, though we thank you just the same," returned Phil.

"No cups? Land sakes, what did you expect to drink out of?" cried the woman in dismay, subjecting the boys to a penetrating scrutiny.

"Guess they haven't made the trip across the plains as many times as we have, Marthy," interposed her husband.

"This is our first time," explained Ted.

"Land sakes, I thought because you knew enough to travel in a 'tourist' you'd been out before. If you haven't cups, then I don't suppose you have anything but boughten pies, cake and such like," sighed the woman.

"We haven't even those," smiled Phil.

"Then how did you expect to eat — beg from those as provided?" she asked.

"Easy, Marthy, easy," protested the man the boys knew only as Silas.

"I can't help it. I've no patience with people who —"

"We intend to get our meals in the dining-car," hastily interposed Ted.

"Must have money to throw away," opined the man.

"We haven't, but we did not know about bringing any food or things with us."

The fact that the young homesteaders did not purpose sponging meals from their fellow passengers quickly re-established them in the motherly woman's eyes, and, reaching under a seat, she drew forth a hamper from which she produced cups, plates, knives, forks, and spoons.

"Now I'm not going to let you boys throw away your money in that dining-car. I don't know your names or anything about you, but you look likely and that's enough for me."

Quickly Phil introduced himself and Ted, telling their new friends briefly about their home and the purpose of their trip.

"Our name is Hopkins," returned the woman, fairly bubbling over with sympathetic interest in the young homesteaders. "I am glad we started yesterday instead of today, Silas. You can give these boys lots of points. One of our sons has a big farm in Idaho. Now you just sit down and I'll go back and get the rest of the breakfast." And Mrs. Hopkins bustled away to the forward part of the car, where the boys beheld a half-dozen other women, their best — and uncomfortable — clothes of the day before changed for easy-fitting gingham dresses.

“This is our sixth trip out, so you see we know the ropes,” explained Mr. Hopkins. “When our sons and daughters travel with us — we’ve got five scattered from California to Idaho — they make us ride in the parlour cars, but Marthy and I prefer the tourists; she says the folks ain’t so stuck up and that our money and things are safer.”

When he had first spoken about early rising, Phil had decided that Mr. Hopkins was an unsuccessful Eastern farmer making a last desperate bid for fortune by going West. But as he heard him tell of the many trips across the continent and of his family, he recalled vividly Dr. Blair’s words about judging by appearances.

Looking down the aisle, Ted saw Mrs. Hopkins bustling about an oil stove, and soon she came toward them with two large plates.

“I always bring ham, it keeps better,” she explained, as she set the plates, the other of which contained fried potatoes, on the table her husband had improvised.

“But I didn’t know they allowed passengers to cook,” exclaimed Phil.

“That’s the beauty of a tourist car,” returned Mr. Hopkins. “Many a time when I have gone into a diner and tasted the messes they set be-

fore me, I've wished I was in a tourist where I could have some of Marthy's cooking."

"I don't wonder, it's bully," declared Ted, as he ate heartily. "We must write Momsy and the girls to come by a tourist car, so they can do their own cooking."

"And I'll give you a list of things to send them, things I've found keep all right, so they won't buy food that will spoil," offered Mrs. Hopkins.

"Thank you, and now isn't there something we can do to return your kindness?" asked Phil, when the simple but satisfying breakfast had been eaten.

"You may wash the dishes," smiled the kindly woman. "That's Silas' job, but he doesn't like it very well."

"We shall be glad to, only you must tell us where to do it," said Ted.

"Just go down to my oil stove. I left some water on it to heat. I'll give you soap, a dish-cloth, and towels;" and again Mrs. Hopkins began rummaging in the hamper, finally producing the required articles.

Picking up the dishes, the boys put them in a basket and started. Four or five young people were already busy at similar tasks, and as Ted



and Phil joined them, they greeted them pleasantly.

Awkwardly and with much embarrassment the boys set about their work.

“Ouch!” cried Phil, snatching his hand from the saucepan of water into which he had put a cup.

“Here, let me show you. I guess you don’t know much about dish-washing,” laughed a pretty girl at the next stove.

“It seems that we don’t,” returned Phil, looking at his still smarting hand.

“First of all, put out the flame of your stove, then get some cold water from the tank and cool that in the saucepan,” directed their assistant.

The fact that they were fellow passengers broke down all barriers of reserve, and by the time the dishes had been washed, the young people were talking of their homes and their hopes.

“I’m so glad you are going to Washington,” said the girl who had come to the young homesteaders’ rescue. “I was afraid Tom and I would be the only young people on the car, but now you’re going through, we can have a jolly time.”

And a jolly time they had, talking, playing cards, building air-castles, and discussing farm problems, in the latter of which Mr. Hopkins joined and gave them much valuable advice.

After the second day of riding through endless acres of land upon which the wheat was just sprouting, the novelty wore away, giving place to that feeling of monotony which the undulating plains bring to Easterners.

"I should like to see a mountain or even a hill," exclaimed Ted, petulantly.

"Mountains! You Easterners don't know what mountains are," returned Mr. Hopkins. "Just wait until you see the Rockies. You'll think your little mountains are hills."

"Well, I'd like to see them, just the same. They are better than these everlasting plains."

"A bit homesick, eh? Just remember that if it weren't for these plains, there wouldn't be enough grain in the country to supply the congested East with flour and things, making the cost of living still higher."

"I didn't mean to be disagreeable, Mr. Hopkins, but we've had nothing but plains for forty-eight hours. I'd like to see something new, or have something happen." And getting up, the boy strolled restlessly down the car, pausing to

say a word to his new acquaintances, finally, the desire for a change still upon him, passing into the next car.

Though this was also a tourist coach, Ted quickly noticed the occupants were anything but prepossessing, and he was thanking his stars that Phil and he were located in the other car when a man spoke to him.

“Sit down and talk to me,” he commanded. “I’m pretty nigh ‘loco’ for the want of some one to swap words with, but there ain’t no one in here I’d speak to.”

The man himself was not a person one would have selected as a travelling companion, being badly in need of a shave and clad in clothes none too clean. But despite his dislike of the fellow, Ted remembered his criticism of Phil’s snobbishness and dropped into the seat.

“I can see you ain’t a ‘prairie dog.’ Going out West for a visit?” began the stranger.

“No. My brother and I intend to take up a homestead.”

“Hope you have plenty of money.”

“Why?”

“Because it takes a pile to get started.”

“How do you mean? The fees for filing an

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entry are only ten dollars for one hundred and sixty acres."

"It's the other things that count, farming tools, horses, men to help build your house and barns and to work your land."

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't think, I *know*. Ten years ago, I came out, full of making a fortune, just like you, and taking up a homestead. I had fifteen hundred dollars. Inside of ten months it was gone; then I lost my claim. The West ain't no place for a poor man."

"But you are still out here."

"Because I ain't got enough money to go back East. By working here and there, I manage to keep alive. Not much like the fortune I set out to make, what?"

To Ted's mood such conversation did not bring relief and he made no reply. Several times the man asked him pointed questions as to his destination and plans, but the boy's answers were evasive and, finally, tiring of the attempts to extract information, he arose and returned to his own car, where he sulked until bedtime.

"Who's there? What do you want?" cried Phil, suddenly awakened by a coat falling on his head. "Is that you, Ted?"



The fact that it was not his brother who had caused the coat's fall was soon established by the latter's asking:

"What is it?"

"My coat fell down and woke me."

In an instant Ted was on his knees in the berth, feeling along the hooks where their clothing had hung.

"Mine's gone!" he cried.

The other passengers had been aroused by the young homesteaders' exclamations, and from several sections came demands of "What's wrong?"

"Some one has taken my coat!" returned Ted.

"Lock the doors of the car!" called Mr. Hopkins, then added: "What's the matter with the lights?"

"They are out," responded a woman.

"We'll all be robbed!" wailed another.

Aroused to the seriousness of the situation, all the passengers hurriedly donned clothes and quickly gathered in the aisle, talking excitedly.

"This won't do. Somebody light a lamp," ordered Mr. Hopkins.

Instantly matches flickered, seemingly from all directions, and soon three of the lamps were lighted.

"Are the doors locked?" called some one.

“It’s too late now. The thief’s had plenty of time to get out of the car,” answered another. But notwithstanding this statement, several men and women rushed to both ends of the car.

“Here’s the coat — on the floor!” cried one of those who had gone forward.

Forcing his way along the aisle, Ted seized the garment and hastily felt in the inside pocket.

“My bill-fold and some letters are gone!” he gasped.

## CHAPTER XVII

### RECEIVING POINTERS

“**M**UCH money in it?” asked several.

“All we had, save a few dollars.”

“Railroad tickets, too?”

“No, I have those. At least, I think I have,” said Phil. “They were in my coat.”

“Better look and make sure,” advised Mr. Hopkins. “Come, Ted, we’ll go find the conductor.”

Ere the boy and his friend had left the car, Phil called:

“The tickets are safe.”

“Evidently the thief dropped the coat before he could search it,” commented Mr. Hopkins. “I’m glad of that. How much money did you lose, Ted?”

“It wasn’t money, sir. We had a letter of credit.”

“Good for you. Then you won’t lose a cent. Just have a little delay, that’s all. I’ll have the conductor notify your bank. In the mean-

time, if you need any ready money, I shall be glad — ”

“ Thank you, we have about thirty dollars between us, in other pockets.”

While they had been talking, the two had passed through three coaches in quest of the conductor, finally finding him in the fourth.

“ Suspect any one? ” demanded that official, when he had been apprised of the robbery.

“ No,” returned Ted.

“ Then it’s a hopeless task to locate the thief, I’m afraid,” said the conductor.

“ Just write a telegram to the bank and I’ll send it at the next station.”

Ordering a brakeman to stay in each passenger coach for the remainder of the night, the man in charge of the train went to the scene of the theft and closely questioned all the passengers, but none of them had seen or heard anything until awakened by Phil’s cries.

The next morning, the conductor reported that a passenger was missing from the car ahead of the boys.

At the announcement Ted started, then, without a word of explanation, hastened to the forward coach, where he found that his talkative acquaintance was nowhere to be seen.



When informed of the facts, the conductor obtained a description of the missing man, which was telegraphed broadcast, and ere evening word was received of the fellow's arrest, with the letter of credit intact, though he had destroyed Ted's correspondence.

Assured that their "letter" was being forwarded to them on the train following, the boys recovered their former high spirits. The wheat fields had given way to the grazing grounds of Montana, and they beheld with interest the herds of cattle and horses, and cried out in delight at their first sight of real cowboys galloping over the range.

"Look! Look! Those must be the Rockies!" exclaimed Ted, as he caught a glimpse of a towering mass from his window toward the middle of the afternoon.

His words sent the other passengers to their windows, and they gazed with awe and wonder at the massive mountains whose summits sparkled with dazzling brilliance, in marvellous colours reflecting the sun's rays as they danced on the snow-capped peaks.

"Now what do you think of your Eastern hills?" smiled Mr. Hopkins, turning toward Ted.

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"They are more beautiful because they are entirely wooded. These are too big and brutal."

"Perhaps you are right, anyhow you are loyal," laughed the man. "The Rockies are certainly 'bad medicine,' as they say out here, to any one who gets lost on them."

This remark evoked many stories of men who had never been seen after entering the mountains, to which the young people listened eagerly until their attention was diverted by a man and woman, both scarcely out of their teens, who boarded the car when a train stopped at a forsaken railroad junction.

"B. and G.," snickered Phil.

"What's a B. and G.?" asked one of the others.

"Hush, not so loud!" cautioned Ted. "It means bride and groom."

At the words the newcomers became the centre of attraction, but they did not seem to mind in the least, for, after they had stowed their luggage and removed their hats and coats, they joined the group in the middle of the car.

"Just been down to the government's experiment station at Boscow," announced the young chap.

Instantly the young homesteaders were all at-

tention. Before purchasing their tickets in Duluth, they had debated the advisability of visiting one of these farms, but had abandoned the idea because of the increased expense.

“Me and my wife ’lowed we’d combine business and pleasure. We just been hitched, so —”

“Lawdy, Jerry, do be quiet!” pouted the bride. “There ain’t no need of telling everybody we are —”

“Well, ain’t ashamed, even if you be,” retorted Jerry.

“’Tain’t that, and you know it, but everybody has troubles of their own.”

“As if you was a trouble, Rosey.”

Fearing that the other young people might not be able to restrain their amusement at this scene much longer, Mr. Hopkins put an end to the danger of offending the bride and groom by asking:

“How did you find things at Boscow? I’ve always thought I should like to see how they run one of those experimental farms, or stations, as they call them.”

“Well, you’d better save your money. It’s interesting, of course, but it’s all experiment,” replied Jerry. “The whole farm is divided up

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into sections. In one they grow stuff according to the way it's always been growed, and in the next they are experimenting with some idee one of the experts has had. Then, 's like as not, the next section ain't got nothing planted at all, just going to waste. And the whole kerboodle of 'em is jest 'loco' over one idee — 'cultivation.' If you ask how many times to irrigate a field of wheat, they'll say 'depends on how it's been cultivated.' It's 'cultivate' all the time. Dry-farming may be all right, but there's too much 'cultivating' and subsoil business about it for me. I'll bet if you waked any of 'em up and told them there was a tornado coming, they'd ask how often it had been 'cultivated.' ”

“I'm afraid you were more interested in Rosey than in the farm,” smiled Mr. Hopkins, as the young husband paused in his tirade against the government stations. “Thanks to the experiments conducted by the government, millions of acres that were considered barren are now bearing crops, and it is cultivation that has wrought the change. Where the rainfall is light and the expense of irrigation is high, the lack of water can be overcome to a certain extent by keeping the soil free from weeds and from a sun-baked crust, which cultivation does. In other



words, dry-farming where the subsoil is suitable. Yet it is only through numerous experiments that this has been proved. The field that you thought was going to waste was undoubtedly a 'summer fallow.' In the semi-arid regions the ground cannot produce crops year after year. When a field which has been cultivated has been left unplanted, it is called a 'fallow.' But in order to enable it to regain its vigour, the ground must be kept free from weeds and the crust broken, in other words, cultivated."

"But why couldn't they tell me how many times to irrigate a wheat field?" demanded Jerry.

"Because that depends on several things — the kind of soil, the grade of the land, the number of years it has been planted, and its general condition. After all, it is a matter of experience."

"Then what's the use of the experiment stations?" persisted the groom.

"Just this. The experts on them plant several fields of, say, wheat and employ a different method with each. A record is kept of each field, and when the wheat is harvested, the yields are compared. The method that has produced the most bushels per acre is then recommended

to wheat-growers where the soil conditions are similar."

"Say, I wish the government would put you on the Boscow station, then a fellow could know what they were talking about without totting a dictionary round with him," commented Jerry. "How can I tell if the subsoil is fit for dry-farming or not?"

"Only by examination. They use a bore some six feet long; I suppose you saw one at Boscow. No? Well, it is a great big augur, with a mark at every foot. Samples of the soil are taken at each foot, and these are examined for moisture and composition. As a usual thing, the greatest moisture is found at a depth of from three to four feet, where there is generally a crust-like formation which holds it. This means that the roots of plants and grains must go down three feet for water when the surface ground is dry. Where this moisture reservoir is five or more feet below the level of the field, the subsoil is said to be unadapted to dry-farming."

For a long time the young homesteaders listened while Mr. Hopkins and Jerry discussed various phases of farming and irrigation; then their attention was absorbed in looking at the

gorges and canyons disclosed as the train wound in and out in its ascent of the Rockies.

At last the station was announced at which the Hopkinses were to leave.

"Don't forget to send that list to your mother," reminded the kind-hearted woman, as she bade the boys good-bye.

"And be sure to let me know how you are getting along and to come to see us, if you ever have the chance," chimed in her husband. "We make our home with my son Fred, here at Avon."

Heartily the boys thanked them for the invitation, their many kindnesses, and the very useful and practical advice.

"Seems as though we were leaving old friends, doesn't it, Phil?" observed Ted, as they returned to the car, having assisted Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins to carry out their bundles.

"I hope you aren't going into a funk every time any one gets off," scoffed his brother. But Jerry prevented any reply.

"Who was that old party?" he asked, dropping into the boys' section.

"His name is Silas Hopkins, that's all I can tell you about him," returned Phil.

"Not really?"

“ So he told us.”

“ Lawsy me! And here I was a-talking to him jest as though he was you or me.”

Jerry's surprise amused the young homesteaders, and, after laughing at it, Ted asked:

“ Why shouldn't you? We were fellow passengers.”

“ Me talk to Silas Hopkins like I did if I'd knowed who he was? Not on your alfalfa! I wouldn't have dared open my yip, let alone a-disputing with him. Lawsy me! Rosey, come here!” he suddenly called. “ Who do you suppose it was that I was a-arguing with?”

“ How should I know, if you didn'?”

“ It was Silas Hopkins!”

“ Lawsy!” gasped the bride, rolling her eyes up.

It was the boys' turn to be surprised at the effect of the name upon the two Westerners, and they wondered at it.

“ Who is Silas Hopkins?” finally asked Phil.

“ Who is he? Say, where do you come from?”

“ Boston.”

“ And you ain't heered of Si Hopkins?”

“ No.”



“ Then I guess I ain’t such a gawp, after all.”

“ But who is he? ”

“ The biggest wheat-grower west of the Rockies and a millionaire.”

“ A mult-*i*-millionaire,” corrected Rosey.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE BOYS FIND A FRIEND

“**T**HOUGH you said there was no money-worshipping in the West,” exclaimed Phil, when at last the bride and groom had returned to their section.

“It is the fact that Mr. Hopkins is the biggest wheat-raiser on the Pacific side of the Rockies that impressed Jerry, and not that he is a millionaire,” retorted Ted.

“Mult-i-millionaire,” smiled his brother, imitating Rosey.

“Here comes the conductor with a telegram. A bag of peanuts it is for us,” exclaimed the younger boy, jumping at the excuse to change the subject.

“You’re on.”

In silence, the young homesteaders watched the official approach.

“The next stop is yours,” he said, pausing at their section.

“I thought there were two other stations be-

fore we came to Chikau," returned Phil, taking a time-table from his pocket.

"They are only flag stations and we have no passengers to let off. I've just heard from our superintendent, and he told me to find out if you boys had money enough to last until your letter of credit reaches you."

"Plenty," declared Phil.

"That is, if it isn't too long," added Ted.

"It will not be more than twenty-four hours."

"Then we are all right, thank you," returned the elder boy.

"You are quite sure?" persisted the railroad man.

"Positive," asserted Phil, adding: "that is, if, as you say, it will not be more than twenty-four hours before our letter of credit reaches us."

"You may see for yourselves," smiled the conductor, and he handed the telegram he held in his hand to the elder of the young homesteaders. And with his brother looking over his shoulder, Phil read:

"White, conductor 69, Westbound.

"Letter of credit belonging to Porter boys will reach Chikau on 69 tomorrow. If they need

ready money, advance them twenty-five dollars and take receipt. Tell agent Chikau to look after them.

“GREY, Supt.”

“Satisfied?” asked the railroad man as the boy returned the telegram to him.

“Perfectly.”

“It is surely very kind of Mr. Grey,” added Ted.

“The railroad always makes it its first business to care for its passengers,” replied the conductor, with the glibness of his kind. “We regret the occurrence very much, and if you think you would feel safer to have the twenty-five dollars in your pocket, why —”

“Chikau! Chikau!” called the brakeman interrupting, and with another hasty refusal of the proffered aid, the young homesteaders quickly gathered together their belongings, bade hurried good-byes to their travelling companions, and left the car.

As they reached the platform, they were joined by the conductor, who growled:

“Confound that agent, he is never here when he’s wanted. Just take this telegram and show it to him. Good-bye and good luck!” And



waving his hand, the railroad man swung aboard the train, leaving the boys standing on the platform, alone in the wilderness save for their luggage.

In silence, Phil and Ted watched the train depart and, when they could no longer see it, turned to survey their surroundings.

Not a soul was to be seen, not even a house.

“Wonder where the town is,” exclaimed Ted, his voice a bit tremulous.

Save the main track, a siding which quickly lost itself in the forest, and an old freight car, they could see nothing but giant trees rearing their lofty tops all about them.

“Don’t you suppose there are any houses in Chikau?” asked Phil. “I wonder why the railroad makes a stop at such a place.” And he looked about him disconsolately, his courage failing as he beheld the forsaken spot they had selected as the location of their new home.

“There must be — somewhere,” declared his brother. “Let’s go up this switch, maybe the town is back from the main line. We can probably find the agent and give him the telegram.”

“Suppose we might as well do that as stay here; we must find a place to sleep.”

Before the boys had picked up their luggage,

however, a big man, clad in corduroys, a blue and yellow bandanna about his neck, came running along the siding.

"Did 64 stop?" he gasped, winded by his haste.

"I don't know whether it was 64 or not, but the train from Duluth did; that's how we got here," replied Ted.

"Just my luck! Hasn't been a passenger stopped for three weeks, and when I go up to camp, 64 not only stops but leaves passengers. Reckon I'll get called down good and plenty. Did the conductor say anything?"

From his words, the boys decided the man must be the station agent.

"He most certainly did," returned Phil; whereat the boys laughed.

"Was he mad?"

"Well, he said," began the older boy, when his brother interrupted with: "What's the use of repeating what Mr. White said, Phil? Just give the gentleman the telegram."

Acting on the suggestion, Phil handed the piece of yellow paper to the agent, and both boys forgot their loneliness in their amusement at the changes of expression that followed one another across the man's face.

“Jumping elk! Wish I’d been here,” he exclaimed, as he finished reading the message. “I haven’t got twenty-five —”

“Never mind, we don’t need it,” interposed Ted, “but if you *will* show us the hotel, we shall be obliged.”

“Hotel?” And the agent chuckled. “There isn’t a hotel within thirty miles.” But observing the looks on the boys’ faces, he added: “But I can find a place for you to put up, all right, all right. Come on.” And he began to pick up the young homesteaders’ hand baggage.

“How about our trunks?” inquired Phil.

“They’ll be just as safe on the platform as anywhere, unless it rains,” returned the agent. “I’ll come down for them later.” Then, noting their well-fitting clothes and hands, which showed no sign of hard labour, his face evidenced his wonder at their presence.

“Got folks here?” he asked, his curiosity proving greater than his control.

“No,” returned Phil.

“Going to work in the logging camp?”

“No.”

“Then what did you come to this neck of the woods for?”

“To take up a homestead,” smiled Ted.

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At this statement the agent again burst into a roar of laughter, slapping his thighs and repeating, "Come to Chikau for a homestead," until his actions nettled Phil and he demanded:

"What's so funny about that?"

"Nothing — only there isn't an acre within twenty miles of Chikau that isn't covered with trees."

At this announcement the boys looked at one another in dismay.

"Wish we'd got off at Avon with Mr. Hopkins," sighed Phil.

"What Hopkins?" asked the man, eagerly.

"Silas Hopkins," both boys answered. And again they were made aware of the potency of that name.

"Why didn't you say you were friends of Si?" demanded the agent. "Reckon if he's back of you, you won't have any trouble locating. Anyway, Andy Howe will do his best for any of Si's friends, to say nothing of the railroad's orders."

"But shucks! You don't want to stay here all night. We'll go up to the 'city.' There are only two houses besides the general store, so we call it the 'city.' How big a section are you planning to take up?"



The change in the agent's manner was very welcome to the young homesteaders, for they had felt pretty lonely as, standing on the platform, they had realized they were face to face with their new life, and they determined to make the most of Howe's friendship.

"We'd thought of a quarter section," returned Ted.

"Good! I know where there's a 'beaut,' just enough timber to pay a little profit and the rest easy to clear."

"Where?" chorused the boys.

"That's telling," smiled Andy. "Until I see Si, I'd rather not say."

"How soon will you see Mr. Hopkins?" inquired Phil.

"I'll jump 15, that's the freight that hauls our logs East tonight and get back tomorrow. Twenty-four hours won't make much difference. Give you a chance to go into the woods and see how we log out here where the trees are trees. Ever see any like those back East?"

Following the direction of the agent's finger, the young homesteaders gazed in wonder at the enormous tree trunks, towering a hundred and more feet above them.

"My eye! but they are big!" exclaimed Ted.

“Only middling here. Wait till you get to where they are logging. Twelve feet through is nothing.”

As the boys were still expressing their wonder at the size of the trees, they rounded a curve in the track and came upon a clearing in which stood two log cabins and a long building, also built of logs.

“Welcome to our city,” grinned Andy.

Again Phil and Ted felt their hearts sink as they beheld the habitations.

“Do they — er — take boarders in any of those cabins?” asked the elder.

“Seeing that one is mine, the other the camp foreman’s, and the third the store, they don’t, that is, the kind we usually get. They are shipped right on to the logging camp. But any friends of Si Hopkins will be taken care of,” returned the agent, leading the way to the long building.

As the trio mounted the steps, a weasel-faced little man appeared in the door.

“Peleg, I want you to put these boys up for a few days,” announced Andy.

“Wall, you *kin* want. Let ’em go through to the camp.”

“Better get your glasses, Peleg. These boys

aren't lumberjacks, they're gentlemen — and special friends of Si Hopkins."

"Why didn't you say so in the fust place? Howde, gents. You kin stay as long as you want. Glad to have you. Hey, Jennie, come git these duds and take 'em up to your room. You kin sleep in the office."

"What did you say your names was?"

"Porter. I am Phil, and this is my brother, Ted," returned the elder boy.

"Mine's Hawkins. Most forgot it, though, ain't heered it for so long. Everybody calls me Peleg."

"Jest sit down on the steps, Jennie will have to slick up a bit before she'll let you go to her room, I cal'late. Set down, too, Andy."

"Can't. I'm going out on 15. Mind, you take good care of these boys, Peleg. I'll be in tomorrow on 64 with your letter of credit." And the station agent started back down the track.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A CLOSE CALL

**S**ORRY, indeed, were the young homesteaders to see their new-found friend depart, for before he was out of sight, the storekeeper opened a bombardment of questions, some of them very personal.

Resenting the attempt to learn their private affairs, the boys parried the most pointed inquiries, though they feared to do so too openly lest they should arouse Peleg's hostility.

Consequently it was with great relief that they heard a shrill voice call:

"You kin show the gents up to their room now, Pap."

At the words Phil and Ted sprang to their feet and began to pick up their luggage.

"Jest let that be!" commanded Peleg. "Hey, Jennie, didn't I tell you to come and git them duds? Do you want to make these gents wait on theirselves?"

"We don't mind in the least, we'd really rather," hastily interposed Ted.



Jennie, however, evidently understood her father's moods, and quickly she appeared in the door, gave a timid glance at the boys, and started to relieve them of their parcels.

While awaiting her coming, Phil and Ted had wondered whether she were young or old, pretty or homely, but neither of them was prepared to see the small, wizened hunchback who stood before them, her face crimson.

"The idea of your carrying our things!" exclaimed Phil, his impulsiveness getting the better of his tact.

"Oh, I don't mind. I'm stronger tha — than I look," stammered Jennie.

"She can tote a bag of meal," proudly declared her father.

"And you let her?" flared Ted, savagely, for he was angry at his brother for his words and at Peleg for allowing the poor little cripple to perform such work.

"Why not? I'm sixty-five and she's twenty. Ain't it better for her to tote meal than an old man like me?"

Ted opened his mouth to give vent to a sharp retort, when Jennie, with a smile at her champion, averted further unpleasantness by asking:

“Will any of the men be down from camp tonight, Pap?”

“They’d better not. There ain’t a dollar in the whole outfit, and I don’t charge nothin’ more, I told ’em so last night.”

“Won’t your refusing credit drive them to Bradley?”

“Not while the company they are working for owns this store. The boss fired five of them the other day for spending real money in Bradley.”

“Well, I hope there won’t any come tonight,” declared the girl, adding, as the boys followed her inside the store, “They call me ‘Spider’ and make fun of me awful.”

“They won’t while we are here,” snapped Phil.

Again the girl flashed the young homesteaders a look of gratitude, then mounted the stairs and opened a door in the loft.

“My room ain’t much to look at, but it’s clean,” she apologized, pausing in the evident hope that her words would be denied; then, as neither boy spoke, she said: “Supper will be ready when you come down.”

Until they could no longer hear her footsteps on the stairs, Phil and Ted kept silence.

“It’s a shame the way that brute Peleg bullies the poor little thing!” growled Ted. “Just look at the way she has tried to decorate her room. Four lithographs and three of them beer advertisements. I’ve brought a bunch of etchings for my room and I’ll give some of them to her. But when Momsy comes, we’ll have her take Jennie to live with us.”

“Easy, Ted, easy! We shall have about all we can do to take care of Momsy and the girls. What do you think of Andy?”

“That he’s better educated than he makes out. But about Jennie. We can take her all right. Just think of those lumberjacks calling her ‘Spider.’ Didn’t you see how she winced when she said it?”

“It’s too bad, I’ll admit. However, we can talk about her later. I’m as hungry as a bear, so let’s get into some comfortable clothes as quickly as we can and go down to the kitchen.”

When Peleg had announced that none of the men from the camp would appear at the store, he was mistaken. While the boys were eating the delicious flapjacks that Jennie was frying, there sounded the tramp of heavy feet in the front part of the building and a voice called:

“Spider, come here!”

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"Set still!" snapped Peleg, as his daughter looked at him, her face white.

Again came the call, more peremptory than before.

"That's the 'Black Swede,' hadn't I better go?" asked Jennie, in a whisper.

"No. He was one of the five the boys fired for trading in Bradley," returned her father. "Go on with your suppers, gents."

"Come out here, you Spider, or I'll put another hump on your back!" roared the voice.

At the brutal words Phil and Ted sprang from their chairs with one accord and rushed into the store.

"Stop 'em! Stop 'em! I'll go, Pap!" pleaded the girl. "They'll git hurted."

But though the young homesteaders heard her words, they paid no heed to them, but when they caught a glimpse of the Black Swede, they halted.

More than six feet tall, his feet encased in spiked boots, a slouch hat pulled down over his villainous face, the man presented an awesome appearance.

"What do *you* want? I called the Spider," he snarled.

Two companions, no more prepossessing than



the other, were with the Swede, and they grinned and chuckled as they beheld the two slender boys facing the giant.

“Miss Jennie is busy. Come back later and Peleg will attend to you,” returned Ted, quietly.

An instant the lumberjack blinked at him, then burst into a roar of laughter.

“Did you hear that?” he asked, turning to his friends. “Called the ‘Spider’ ‘*Miss Jennie*,’ says she’s busy and we can come back later?” Then he faced the boys again. “Well, we won’t go! so jump and hustle out the ‘Spider’!”

“Miss Jennie is busy,” repeated Ted.

“Then I’ll find her maself.”

“No, you won’t,” snapped Phil.

“Who’ll stop me?”

“We will.”

“You? Why, with one hand I could wring — ”

“That will do, Jonson. I told you to leave Chikau on the day I discharged you,” exclaimed a quiet voice.

As they heard it, the lumberjacks wheeled toward the door and gazed, in amazement, at a powerfully built man who stood just inside the entrance, having come in unobserved while the Swede was baiting the boys.

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"The boss!" gasped the trio, making a rush to escape.

But the newcomer placed himself in the doorway.

"You didn't go when I ordered you to, Jonson. Now you will not go until I tell you that you can. I found, on looking over Peleg's accounts, that you owe the store six dollars. I heard you were hanging around, so I came down from camp. You will go back and work out your bill."

"When?" snarled the giant.

"Right now. If you hurry, you will get there in plenty of time to get a nap before breakfast."

"Wall, I won't."

"Oh yes, you will."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because I tell you to."

A moment the two men looked each other straight in the eyes, then the Black Swede growled, "All right," and the boss stepped aside to allow his man to pass from the store.

As he departed, the other two men started to follow him.

"Where are you going?" demanded the boss.

"With Blackie," answered one of them.

"Oh no, you're not. Jonson is too good a man

for you to spoil him. If it hadn't been for you, he never would have gone to Bradley. I'm going to take you down to the station and ship you on the first train passing. Come along."

Again there was the clash of eyes. Again the boss won, and the two men slunk out the door while their master followed, saying:

"I'll be back later, Peleg."

## CHAPTER XX

### IN THE LUMBER CAMP

“**W**HO is that man?” asked the boys, as they returned to their supper.

“Steve Anderson, the camp foreman,” replied Peleg.

“But Jonson was a great deal the bigger,” declared Ted.

“Sartain, but without the heart. Steve has the heart, his muscles are steel, and every lumberjack west of the Rockies knows it. There ain’t a foreman from British Columby to ole Mex can git so much work outen his men, and never have no shootin’, as Steve.”

“And he’s jest as kind as he is brave,” added Jennie. “He never goes to the city that he don’t bring me back suthin’, candy or a dress.”

“I should think you would rather have books in a lonesome place like this,” observed Phil.

“I would, only,” and the girl flushed, “I can’t read.”



In amazement the young homesteaders looked at Jennie, for, though they had heard of people who could not read or write, she was the first one they had ever seen.

“Then I’ll teach you,” said Ted, impulsively.

“Honest?” And Jennie’s face shone with delight.

“We’ll begin this very night.”

“I’m afraid we can’t.”

“Why?”

“Because I haven’t any books.” Then her face brightened as an idea came to her and she said:

“Perhaps Steve has one he’ll lend me.”

“You need not bother to ask him, I have plenty,” smiled Ted. “Now let’s hurry up with the dishes, so we can begin.”

Neither Jennie nor her father would listen to their guests helping in such work, however, and the boys passed through the store with Peleg and seated themselves on the steps while the storekeeper filled his pipe and smoked.

“It was kind in you to take Jennie’s part, but I wouldn’t do it again,” he observed.

“Why not?” asked Phil and Ted, almost in the same breath.

“Because you ain’t big enough to back it up.

If it hadn't been for Steve, I don't know what would have happened. I was getting my gun, but if you'd mixed it, 'twould have been hard work telling which was which to shoot."

"There wouldn't have been any need to use it," said the same quiet voice that had terminated the threatened trouble in the store.

"You back, Steve? I ain't heered any train," declared Peleg.

"I sent the jacks down on the engine with Jim." Then, with the freedom of the woods, he turned to the boys. "So long as you looked Jonson in the eye, you had him. He saw you had the heart to face him and it funk'd him. Men like him are more animal than human, and I suppose you know that if you ever get into a tight place with an animal, the thing to do is to stare it straight in the eyes."

"Will that work with b'ars, Steve?" inquired the storekeeper.

"Sure, even with grizzlies. But you must keep perfectly still. Once you move, you've got to act lively. You chaps going to be here long?"

"Several days," replied Phil.

"They're friends of Si. Come in on 64," explained Peleg.

“And our name is Porter; that’s Phil and I am Ted,” supplemented the latter.

“Glad to know you, especially after this evening. If you have time, you must come up to camp, if you’d like to see how we get out logs in Washington.”

“Indeed we should,” exclaimed both boys.

“Then why not go up with me in the morning?”

Eagerly the young homesteaders accepted the invitation, and after talking awhile, Ted went into the store to instruct Jennie in the mysteries of the alphabet, while the foreman went to his cabin, promising to call for them at five in the morning.

“What’s that, a fog-horn?” cried Ted, rousing suddenly from his sleep at a series of staccato toots.

“We’re not on the Admiral now, stupid! I should think you would know that from the bed,” returned his brother.

“Then what was it I heard?”

Before Phil could express an opinion, there came a timid knocking at their door, and Jennie called:

“Breakfast is ready and Steve is waiting for you on the engine.”

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“That is your fog-horn,” Phil flashed at his brother; then asked: “Why didn’t you call us before?”

“I did, sir, twice.”

“Guess this bed isn’t so hard, after all,” commented Ted.

“Are you up *now*, Mr. Porters?” inquired the girl.

“We are,” chorused the boys, and in quick order they descended to the kitchen, ate their breakfasts, and boarded the engine.

“Hang on tight, this is no ordinary roadbed,” cautioned the foreman, as the engineer pulled open the throttle. And the young homesteaders soon learned that he spoke the truth.

More like a dory at the mercy of a high sea than a locomotive did the engine seem as it pitched and tossed over the rails, first one side, then the other, sinking sharply, in many cases taking a curve before it righted itself.

“How in the world can you pull a train over this track?” Phil asked the engineer, as the locomotive struck a comparatively level stretch.

“This is nothing, what, Steve?” grinned the man at the throttle.

“Not for us, Jim.” Then, turning to his guests, the foreman continued: “We can’t take



the time to lay much of a roadbed, we move too often. We've only been hauling over this course two days, and tomorrow will see us through with it."

"My eye! but it must use up a lot of rails to change so often," commented Ted.

"It would if we didn't move them with us. As fast as we finish one course, we pull up the track and lay it in a different direction. That's why it doesn't pay to spend much time over the roadbed. But, as Jim says, this course is nothing. In some places the inclines are so steep that we are obliged to use cog-wheel tracks. When we stop, you can look at the cog-wheels under the engine. All our cars are equipped with them. They hold the train on the track, no matter how sharp the grade, or steep the pitch."

Three piercing blasts from the whistle drowned the comment on Phil's lips, and with a grinding of brakes, the engine stopped.

"That's the camp," announced Steve, nodding toward half a dozen cabins from which men of all sizes and descriptions were pouring, ready to begin their day's work.

"There's the Black Swede," suddenly exclaimed Ted, who had been watching the lumber-

jacks as they emerged from their log houses. "I'd recognize him anywhere."

"I thought he'd be here, but I wanted to make sure," smiled the foreman. "Jim, run up the branches and pick up your train. If we are not here when you are ready, don't wait. We'll walk; the boys can see more." And descending from the engine, Steve and his young guests set off among the huge tree stumps.

"How many 'branches' do you have?" inquired Phil.

"Four, two on each side. In that way we can clear a tract two thousand feet wide and four thousand feet long with each course of track."

"What's that? It sounds like the whir of an airship?" suddenly asked the younger boy.

"That's the drums unwinding the cables."

"Cables?" exclaimed both young homesteaders, together.

"Exactly. We haul the logs by cable, they are too big to handle in any other way. But you will see how it's done in a few minutes."

For several rods the trio advanced in silence, when they were halted by a lusty "Stand clear!"

"Tree falling," explained the foreman, and with his words there sounded a creaking and

snapping, then a sharp crackling followed quickly by a mighty crash, as an enormous tree fell to the earth with a shock that made the ground tremble.

"We'll go on now," said Steve, and in a few minutes they were in sight of the tree just felled, a monster some hundred and twenty feet long and fifteen feet through the butt.

Already the lumberjacks were swarming like ants about it, some sawing the trunk into thirty-foot lengths, others trimming off branches.

"Why, there's a platform around that stump," observed Phil, in surprise.

"That is for the sawyers. It would take too long to chop these trees down, so we saw them."

"But why build a platform? Why not stand on the ground?" inquired the boy.

"Because the bases of these trees are often rotted so that the timber is worthless for five, sometimes ten, feet," explained the foreman.

"Oh, look, there comes the cable," cried Ted, pointing to where several men were pulling on a lead-wire to which was attached a three-inch twisted steel rope.

Quickly the jacks seized the cable and made it fast to a log near the tree just felled.

"Ready?" called one of them.

“Ready!” replied the others.

Putting a tin whistle to his lips, the first man blew three times. From the distance came an answering toot, followed by the mighty whirring. With a sharp hum the cable tightened, and then the huge log, weighing many tons, started through the woods, hurdling everything in its path as it was drawn along with irresistible power.

“We’ll follow the log,” said Steve, but so fast did it travel that the boys were obliged to trot to keep pace with it.

After scrambling along for some seven hundred feet, the young homesteaders beheld a donkey engine, puffing, snorting, and rocking on its skids from the exertion, close beside a spur of track upon which stood several flat cars.

When the log was abreast of one of them, the hauling cable was released. Others were adjusted, again the “donkey” puffed, and the section of tree trunk was pulled aboard.

“Only think of bringing in a log from where that one lay and loading it on a car without a man’s lifting a pound!” exclaimed Phil. “Wouldn’t it make the Eastern lumbermen open their eyes, though! There, you know, Mr. An-



derson, the logs are handled by hand and horses in the woods."

"We couldn't afford to do that here, it would take too many men and too much time. But if you think it would surprise them to see how we handle logs, what would they say when they saw our donkey load itself?"

"There is a limit even to our credulity, Mr. Anderson," smiled Ted.

"But I'm telling you the truth. You notice the ends of the donkey's skids are hewed like sled-runners, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's so the engine can be pulled along. We simply hitch the cables to trees, the drums wind up, and the donkey pulls itself over the ground. When it is opposite the car on which it is to be loaded, we readjust the cables around other trees and it pulls itself aboard."

"It's wonderful," exclaimed Ted. "You Westerners can certainly show the rest of the country how to do things in a big way."

## CHAPTER XXI

### MORE GOOD LUCK

“**A**RE such riggings very expensive?” inquired Ted of the foreman, after they had watched the donkey pay out cables and haul in and load other logs.

“That depends on your idea of expense,” returned Steve. “The cables alone are worth close to a thousand dollars for each engine and the en — ”

“You need not say any more,” broke in the boy. “We couldn’t even buy the cables.”

“Why should you want to? Think of starting in the logging business?”

“Hardly, but we are going to take up a homestead and, as we shall be obliged to clear it, I wondered how much a rigging like this would cost.”

The announcement of the boys’ purpose surprised and interested Steve.

“You don’t say!” he exclaimed. “Ever had any experience farming?”

“No.”

“Then, if I were you, I’d tackle something else. It’s no easy job clearing land, and when you’ve got it cleared, like as not the soil will be so dry you’ll have to irrigate it. I’ve seen a lot of farmers, good ones too, who came out here thinking they’d get rich in a few years. But when they found there was a mighty sight of difference between doing and thinking, before the time came when they could ‘commute,’ they’d quit.”

“Why?” asked Phil.

“Too hard work, that and the cost of getting started.”

“We expect to work hard; we realized that we should be obliged to before we came out here.”

“You sure will, especially as you don’t know anything about clearing ground or planting. Why not take something easy — a job with me, say?”

“You call this work felling and sawing trees ‘easy’?” asked Ted.

“No, I didn’t mean that. I want some men to keep books — one in camp here and one at Peleg’s store. His accounts are in a terrible mess. Understand, I don’t mean he’s dishonest,

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but they are so mixed up it's an awful job to find out how much a man owes the company. Jonson was owing six dollars when I discharged him, but until I looked up the records to close his account, I didn't know it. What do you say? I couldn't offer you more than fifty a month and board, but there's no place where you can spend anything in these woods."

"Much obliged, but we can't do it," replied Phil, after looking at his brother.

"Why not? You boys ain't got the slightest idea of the work and trouble of taking up a homestead. When men brought up on farms give it up, what show have you? Just talk with the jacks when they come in for grub. Every other one of them, almost, has sunk all he had on a claim and then woke up and got into logging, where there is real money. I can tell you of —"

"There's no need," interrupted Ted. "We came out here to take up a homestead and we shall do it. Because others quit is no sign that we shall. Besides, our case is different." And on account of the kind interest the foreman had evinced, the boy told him of the little mother ill at home.

"You've sure got pluck," commented Steve,



when the story was finished. "But what made you come to Chikau? If I'd been you, I'd have gone into Canada. There you can get what they call 'a ready-made home.' The government, after looking you up and finding you O. K., not only gives you a quarter section, but builds a house and barn on it for you, and will loan you from five hundred to five thousand dollars with which to equip, stock, and get your farm started."

"The United States is good enough for us," returned Phil. "But I should think our government would do the same for its settlers."

"It's beginning to. So many families that entered claims in this country have left them and crossed the line, it had to do something. At present, however, the few 'ready-made homes' in the United States are controlled by private interests, and the rates they charge are so high a man can hardly pay when crops are good. When they are not, he can't. As I asked before, how'd you come to pick out Chikau?"

"A friend of ours heard that it was a promising region," said Phil.

"And Andy — I mean Mr. Howe — says he knows a fine place. He's gone to talk with Mr. Hopkins about showing us where it is."

"He has, eh?" exclaimed the foreman, in surprise. "H'm! Reckon I know where it is."

"Where?" asked both boys, eagerly.

"I'll let Andy tell you. But if you get it and Si says the word, I'll bring over one of my riggings and clear what you want."

"Will you really? How much will it cost?" queried Ted.

"Not a cent; that is, I'll take my pay in logs and you can sell my company the rest."

"That will be splendid. You're mighty kind, Mr. Anderson!" exclaimed both young homesteaders.

"Don't 'mister' me, or anybody else out here! We aren't used to it. You boys have the heart, I saw that when you faced the Swede last night. That's what counts with me. So you can bank on my doing all I can to help you."

This promise revived the boys' spirits, which had sunk to a low ebb as they had listened to the foreman's statements concerning men who had given up their struggle with the wild land, and they passed the rest of the day tramping about the tract with Steve, entirely forgetful of their letter of credit, picking up all the points they could and asking countless questions.

“Andy wants you to go right down to the station,” shrilled Jennie from the steps of the store where she had been watching for them, as she beheld Phil and Ted climbing off the engine. “I thought you never was coming. Pap ’lowed you mought of got hurted. Hurry back, I’ll have supper ready.”

“Why should Andy send for us?” mused Phil, as the engine started again.

“Station’s the only place to talk, where Peleg won’t be listening,” smiled Steve. “Evidently Andy has something important to say.”

“Why, we have for —” began Ted, only to be interrupted by the engineer.

“Bet Peleg’s snooping down there now,” chuckled Jim.

“Yes, there he is,” cried Steve, pointing to a figure gliding among the trees, as they neared the freight-car station.

“Oh, you Peleg! Better get back to the store,” shouted the foreman. “Andy said he’d duck you in the water tank if he caught you snooping — and you know you don’t like water.”

Never a word did the storekeeper reply, but the others all laughed as they saw him turn and go back.

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“Aren’t hurt, are you?” called Andy, anxiously, as he caught sight of the boys. “You’ve been gone so long, I was getting uneasy. Never supposed any one would forget to meet a train that was bringing him money.”

At the agent’s words the boys looked at one another in dismay.

“Our letter of credit!” they cried together.

“Exactly,” returned Andy. “It didn’t seem natural that two ki — er — strangers should not be on hand to meet the train that was bringing them so important a document. First, I thought you were late. Then, as time went on and you did not appear, I decided you must have been injured. I couldn’t believe you would *forget* a — ”

“Oh, cut the lecture, Andy,” Steve broke in. “I don’t know what you are talking about, but if there’s any blame coming, put it on me. I asked Ted and Phil to go to camp with me and tried to make them have a good time.”

“Which you evidently succeeded in doing,” the agent commented drily.

So serious was Andy that the boys felt something must have happened.

“Wouldn’t the man on the train give it to you?” asked Phil, in alarm.



During this scene, which they did not in the least understand, Steve and Jim had glanced about the station, noticed the agent's rifle lying across a box, while at his side hung his pistol holster.

"What's up? Never saw you packing a gun before," commented the engineer.

"I want you to see me pass this money to Phil and Ted."

"Money for us?" exclaimed the boys, in surprise.

"Exactly."

"But we haven't any coming," said Phil.

"Yes, you have. Five hundred and forty dollars."

"From whom?" demanded Ted.

"Si Hopkins. He sent it to cash your letter of credit. Said there wasn't any bank short of Waterfield and that you'd need it to fit out with."

"But we haven't the letter yet," returned Phil.

"Wrong again. I've got it. Express messenger on 64 gave it to me. Here it is, with the money." And the agent lifted the box and took from beneath it the recovered letter of credit and a pile of bills. "Count them, please,

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then sign this draft. It's to Si. If you act lively, I can send it back on 17; she's whistling now."

Quickly both young homesteaders went to the table and affixed their signatures to the draft which would reimburse Mr. Hopkins for the money he had sent.

"Have we time to write a letter?" asked Phil.

"No. Andy's flagging 17 now," returned Steve.

"I've written 'Thank you very much. More later,'" said Ted. "Hurry and sign it, Phil."

"Got your names down?" demanded the agent, poking his head through the door. "Good! Put the draft in the envelope I've addressed to Si and the letter of credit with it. That's the stuff. Give it here, lively!"

And with a bound Andy started for the cab of the engine, which had just stopped, handing the envelope to the engineer with instructions to deliver it to the agent at Avon if he valued his job.

"Now perhaps you'll act like a sane man and tell us what this is all about," said Steve, as Andy returned to his station.

"I wanted to get that letter back to Si to-night, I told him I would."

“What about the ‘beaut’ section?” asked Ted.

“It’s yours. We’ll go to it tomorrow. Si’s coming over himself by and by to see how you are getting along.”

“You boys have sure landed on your feet,” declared the foreman. “What else did Si say, Andy?”

“A lot.”

“Then let’s hear it. Jim and me got to go back to camp.”

“There’s nothing more to hear. What else Si said was just for Andy Howe’s ears.” And he bustled about, so full of importance that the others laughed.

“Quit fussing round and come up to supper,” ordered Steve.

“Can’t. Got to wait for 18.”

“Why, we don’t expect any cars tonight,” declared Jim.

“But I do.”

“What have you got coming — airship?” grinned Steve.

“No. Horses.”

“Horses? In Chikau?” gasped the engineer.

“That’s what I said.”

“What for?”

“Phil and Ted and me. Si’s lending them.”

“Going to start a livery stable?” grinned Jim.

“Not much. These horses are for the boys and me to ride about on. We have too much ground to cover to walk.”



## CHAPTER XXII

### ON THE CLAIM

THE sending of the money and the horses by the wealthy wheat-raiser indicated to the lumbermen that they would do themselves no harm by rendering every assistance in their power to his protégés, and Steve was quick to recognize the fact.

“I told the boys, if Si said the word, I’d take one of my riggings over, clear the land, and buy the logs from them,” he announced.

“What makes you think the claim they are going to take up is anywhere near here?” demanded Andy.

“Oh, come off! I’m not a fool. It’s just the place for them, too.”

“Let’s go up and have supper,” suggested Ted. “I’m right hungry and we can talk just as well there. Come on, Andy!”

“But 18 might come in.”

“It’ll be the first time she ever got here before midnight, if she does,” commented Jim. “Call up and find out where she is.”

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Jumping to his telegraph instrument, Andy beat a veritable tattoo on the key as he asked for 18's whereabouts, finally announcing:

"She'll be here in an hour."

"Then we shall have plenty of time. Come on!" cried Phil, springing to the ground.

"Hold on!" called Andy. "When we're at the store, 'mum is the word.'"

"That's mean, especially to Jennie," protested Ted. "She and Peleg are almost wild with curiosity, and it can't do any harm to tell them about things."

"It can't, eh? You don't know Peleg," retorted the agent. "If he knew where you are going to settle, he'd beat you to it."

"We needn't tell him that, especially as we don't know ourselves, but I can't see any harm in talking over other matters," declared Phil.

"Sure! Let Jennie and Peleg in on the excitement," urged Steve, and accordingly it was agreed that they should be told of Mr. Hopkins' sending the horses and of his promised visit but not of his forwarding any money.

"What relation be you to Si?" queried the storekeeper of Phil, when he had been told the facts.

“Isn’t that the whistle of old 18?” exclaimed Steve, ere either of the boys could speak.

“That’s what it is,” asserted Andy, after a moment’s pretended listening. “Who’s going down to the track with me?”

Having purposely created the diversion that there might be no necessity of answering Peleg, Steve quickly announced that he, the boys, and Jim were going.

“Oh, I wish I could. I’ve never seen horses unloaded from a car,” exclaimed Jennie, wistfully.

“You shall. Come on!” cried Ted.

“You can’t, nuther. There won’t be no one to watch the store unless I stay and I want to go,” whined the storekeeper.

“I guess I can’t go,” sighed his daughter. “I’ve got to stay here.”

“You’ll do no such thing. It won’t hurt Peleg to stay himself,” answered the boy, and, seizing her hand, he hurried her along.

They were obliged to wait a good half-hour, however, before the train arrived.

“Aren’t they beauties?” cried Phil, as the three horses stood on the ground.

“They sure are, and kind and easy to ride as kittens,” declared Andy. “Si was afraid you

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might not be much on riding, so he sent two of his grandchildren's ponies."

"Yours is a man-eater, I suppose?" grinned Jim.

"Well, there's some folks I know couldn't ride him," retorted the agent. "Here, Phil, you and Ted take your choice. This sorrel is Pat, and the roan is Daisy."

"Which do you want, Ted?" asked his brother.

"You are the elder, it's your first choice."

"Then I'll take Pat, he's bigger."

"Good! Here are the saddles and bridles. Put them on and we'll ride up to the store," said Andy.

But before they could obey, it was necessary to show the boys how to place the saddles and tighten the girths, for they did not know a cinch from a throat-latch. And fortunate it was that Mr. Hopkins had selected clever and gentle ponies, for the young homesteaders were sorry riders.

"Never mind, a baby can manage them, and you'll soon catch on to the trick of sitting in a saddle," said Steve, as they made the animals fast for the night in the store shed. "There's one thing not to forget — whether you go without food and water, or not, be sure that Pat and



Daisy don't. A good horseman always takes care of his pony before he does of himself. If you ever need a horse, you'll need it badly, and a pony will do more for a person who is kind to it than for one who isn't. And don't think a horse doesn't know the difference, for it does."

The animals attended to, Andy and the boys went into the store, where they purchased a supply of provisions, axes, woodmen's hatchets, shovels, hammers and nails, and rifles and revolvers, with the necessary shells and cartridges.

"Ever do any shooting?" asked the agent, while Peleg was packing their stuff in stout sacks.

"Only a little, in shooting galleries," returned Phil.

"Then you must learn. Peleg, you'd better triple that order of shells and cartridges." Then, turning again to the boys, he continued: "You ought to practise, say, half an hour every day. You never know when you may stumble across a bear in these forests. When you get your cattle, you're more than likely to be visited by mountain lions, and when you shoot at a bear or a lion, you want to shoot straight."

Every minute that they were in the woods gave Phil and Ted a clearer understanding of

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the fact that they were in that part of the world where men were accustomed to rely upon their own resources and ingenuity, and the realization was rapidly developing them from care-free, happy-go-lucky school boys into sober manhood.

While the station agent had been dilating upon the necessity of being able to use their firearms intelligently, Phil and Ted had been handling the weapons, but their awkwardness showed they knew practically nothing about them.

“If I can’t read, I *can* shoot,” exclaimed Jennie. “Let me show you, Ted.” And taking his rifle, she explained to him how to load and empty the magazine and to hold the rifle when shooting, doing the same with the big 44 revolver. Then she made the boy go through the motions himself until, at last, he felt at home in working the different mechanisms.

“Remember,” she said, finally, “always to keep your guns clean and oiled and your shells and cartridges dry.”

“And if I was you, I’d sleep on my shooting irons,” advised Peleg. “Then you’ll know where they are and no one can steal them from you.”

“You talk as though this was a desperate country,” laughed Phil.

“It isn’t that, it’s like it is with the ponies — when you need your guns, you’ll need them mighty bad,” put in Andy. “And now that everything’s ready, you’d best go to bed. We start at five tomorrow morning.”

Though the boys went to their room, they had so many things to talk over that it was a long while before they went to sleep. Yet they were up betimes, fed their ponies, ate a hearty breakfast, and were on their way only a little after the hour set by their guide.

Because of the packs tied to each saddle and the inexperience of the boys in riding, they travelled slowly.

“How much farther is it to our section?” asked Phil, after they had been in the saddle more than two hours.

“Getting tired?” inquired Andy.

“No-o. I was only wondering how we’d ever get Momsy and the girls to our homestead.”

Smiling at the excuse, their guide replied:

“Oh, you will be able to put a road through before they come. Your claim is only about twenty-five miles from the station at Chikau.”

“My eye! That will be some haul for our provisions,” declared Ted.

“Oh, you’ll go to Bradley for them, that will

be only fifteen miles from where your claim is. But I wouldn't go there very often. It's a pretty bad place, especially at night."

All during their advance through the woods, Andy had chopped off branches at intervals of a rod or so, leaving the partially severed limbs hanging and occasionally cutting the bark from a tree trunk.

"Why do you do that?" asked Phil.

"I'm blazing the trail, so you can ride over, whenever you like, without danger of getting lost. At first, when you go about your claim, you had better do the same. This is a bad country to get lost in, and to any one who doesn't know the woods it's mighty easy to miss the way."

"But why don't you cut the branches clean off?" queried Ted.

"Because a cut, or broken, hanging branch is everywhere the sign of a trail."

Now mounting sharp inclines, now descending into gullies, the trio advanced, finally coming to a ridge below which extended a wooded flat.

"There's your claim," announced Andy, drawing rein. "At least, if I were you I'd choose it, but you can take up any of the land we've crossed, or in any direction you can see."



As they realized they were looking upon the spot selected by both Mr. Hopkins and their guide as the site of their homestead, the boys gazed about them, too deeply affected to speak for many minutes.

“I’d like it if it weren’t all covered with trees,” finally declared Phil.

“You didn’t expect plowed ground, did you?” demanded their companion, sharply.

“I think it is perfectly bully!” quickly exclaimed Ted. “Look, Phil, there is a brook, to the right, from which we can get water for irrigation.”

“Exactly,” returned Andy. “You couldn’t find another quarter section so level, with the water so handy, yet having a sufficient fall to serve your land, if you searched a hundred miles.”

“But the trees,” protested the elder boy. “They seem thicker than where Steve is logging.”

“That’s because you are looking down on them. As a matter of fact, you’ll be surprised to see how much clearing there is when you get down there. But after you have been at work a couple of weeks, you’ll see a big difference.”

“The stumps will be left, though. And we’ve

got to put some land under cultivation this year, you know."

"Dynamite will remove the stumps for you. What do you think, do you want to stake your claim here?"

Quickly the boys looked at one another, doubt in the elder's eyes, confidence in Ted's.

"Yes, indeed, we do!" asserted the younger, emphatically. "At least, *I* do. If you don't like it, you can select a place for yourself, Phil."

"If it suits you, it suits me, Ted."

"Then come on, let's get onto it!"

Led by Andy, they were soon on the flat, and in a few more minutes their guide drew rein on the bank of the creek.

"Here's a likely place to build your shake-down," he declared.

Dismounting, they took the packs from the saddles, hobbled the ponies, and, under Andy's directions, fell to work cutting poles, placing them and thatching a hut of boughs, some ten feet long, five wide and six high.

Taking the hammer and nails, their companion drove a row along each side of the roof-pole.

"Always hang your provisions up," he said, as he suited his actions to his words. "That is,

until you have your log cabin, and it's not a bad plan even then. It saves them from ants and all sorts of prowling animals. And now let's get dinner."

"That suits me," exclaimed Ted. "What shall we have? I can fry eggs."

"There, we forgot to get a stove, Andy!" exclaimed the elder boy. "That's one on you. We're in a pretty fix, miles from anywhere with nothing on which to cook."

"You sure don't know much about an entry-man's life," chuckled the agent. "You don't need a stove yet. Just come down to the brook and I'll show you a trick. How do you suppose trappers and men who roam the woods cook their meals? They can't be carrying stoves about with them." And going to the water, he selected a thin flat stone, built others up on three sides and placed the first one upon them.

"There's your stove. Now build a fire underneath and in a few minutes it will be so hot you can fry your eggs on it. Make another fire and set your coffee-pot in it.

"One thing you must be careful about, though. Always put out your fire — *and see that it is out* — before you leave it. If you don't, you may start a forest fire that will take months to put

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out and destroy thousands of dollars' worth of lumber."

While Ted fried the eggs, Phil brought out crackers, jam, and pickles, and in due course the dinner was ready.

"Just think, Phil, we're having our first meal on our very, very own homestead!" exclaimed Ted.

"And here's success, and the best of it to you!" said Andy, raising his tin cupful of coffee.

Silently and solemnly the three clinked their cups and drank the toast.



## CHAPTER XXIII

“ BEARS! ”

DINNER finished — and it tasted all the better because the boys cooked it themselves, upon what was to be their new home — they washed the dishes, wet down the fire, and were picking up their saddles, preparatory to putting them on their ponies, when Andy stopped them.

“ Hold on there, not so fast! A horse can't eat as rapidly as a man, and when there is no pressing need, you never should use one directly after feeding.”

“ But we want to ride over our claim,” declared Phil.

“ Can't you walk? ”

“ Why, yes,” flushed the boy, “ I suppose so, but I thought no one walked out West.”

The answer drew a hearty laugh from their companion. “ You're not on a ranch, but a farm,” he replied, finally. “ Besides, we can examine the land much better on foot. At the Land Office they'll ask you if you are familiar

with the land on which you wish to file, and I want you to be able to say 'yes' truthfully."

"Will our things be safe here?" inquired Phil.

"No; probably the neighbour's children will run off with them," smiled their companion.

"Seriously, though, they will. You don't need locks in this part of the world. If any one does come along; he'll eat what he needs, if he is out of grub himself, but he won't harm or steal anything. Of course, there may be an occasional 'bad man,' but he is soon run out of the region. And another thing, don't refuse a meal to any one or to help any one. You never know when you may need one or both."

"There, Phil, you see the trees aren't very thick," observed his brother, as their guide concluded. "And over to the right there are none at all. We'll plow that up first."

"Better keep it to graze your stock on; cattle and horses like this natural grass," advised Andy.

"What we shall do when you leave us, I don't know," said Phil.

"I don't mean to be 'bossy.' I'm just trying to give you all the pointers I can."

"I realize that, Andy. It's only that we don't seem to hit anything right. Hey, Ted, what are you digging for — gold?"

“ No, angleworms. I read somewhere that you should never buy land for a farm where there were no angleworms, the soil wouldn't be productive.”

“ I'm afraid you won't find any, there's too much duff,” said the agent.

“ What is duff? ” asked both boys.

“ The — well — blanket formed by the leaves, rotted limbs, and logs that always covers the ground in forests.”

“ Well, you're wrong for once,” cried Ted, gleefully, as he held up a squirming worm.

“ Glad I am,” smiled Andy. “ Now it won't be necessary for you to take my word that this land is fertile.

“ There's another thing I must tell you about. At the Land Office they'll ask you a lot of questions, and one will be about whether there's enough rainfall to serve your crops. As to that, I can't inform you. You are surrounded by hills.”

“ Mountains, we call them,” interrupted Phil.

“ Well, mountains, then, so they may cut off your rain.”

“ But we have the brook, so we can irrigate,” put in Ted.

“ Say, who is telling this — you or me? ”

"Go on, we won't interrupt again," promised the boys.

"What I am trying to say to you is that the eastern side of hills and mountains always receives more rain and moisture than the western. No, I can't tell you why it is, but it's true; at least, so the irrigation and dry-farming experts say. Now you have both an eastern and a western slope on your land, and if you don't get rain enough, you can irrigate."

"But one part of a hundred and sixty acres wouldn't receive any rain when another didn't, would it?" Phil asked.

"You just wait and see. Wind currents and hills do queer things with rain."

"How about minerals or coal? They'll ask if there are any here, won't they?" queried Ted.

"Tell them 'no.' Si had this flat examined for coal; that's how I happen to know about it."

At the words, confirming as they did the younger boy's opinion that the agent was other than he pretended to be, they both glanced at one another.

"Then you can tell us about the subsoil, I suppose," flashed Ted.

"That's for you to find out. Si said he told you how it was done."



“ But we haven’t any bore.”

“ Just try this; ” and Andy unslung a long leather case, which had caused the young homesteaders much curiosity, from his shoulder, opened it, and took out several pieces of augur. “ It’s a sectional bore, ” he said, fitting the parts together. “ More convenient to carry than a single six-foot length.”

There were marks, every twelve inches, just as Mr. Hopkins had described to them in the train, and, when the handle had been adjusted, Ted took it.

“ You watch for the footmarks, Phil, and notice the moisture while I turn the bore, ” he ordered.

“ One foot, fairly moist. Go on! Stop! Two feet, real damp. Try again! Three feet, wet. Any use of going deeper, Andy? Mr. Hopkins said the natural reservoir was usually three or four feet down.”

“ What do you think, Ted? ” asked their companion.

“ That we’ve gone far enough. If the soil is moist at one foot, damp at two, and wet at three, the crop roots won’t lack water the first season, anyway.”

“ Right you are. Let’s go over to the west slope and try.”

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To the boys' surprise, when the test was repeated, the soil was practically dry until the four-foot level was reached and then it was only moist.

"Guess you are right about the rainfall," admitted Phil. "We'll be obliged to irrigate this side."

"I am glad you boys appreciate the necessity and value of irrigation," commented the agent. "If more entrymen were aware of its importance and possibilities, they would use greater care in selecting their homestead lands — and there wouldn't be so many abandoned. How'd you come to know about it, Si tell you?"

"He did — but we've read up on it ourselves," replied Ted.

"You mean *you* have," returned his brother. "I'm not much on such matters, Andy, but Ted is daffy over building things. I believe he has already decided on his system."

"How about it, Ted?" smiled the agent.

"I have one in mind. After I have examined the water supply I shall know whether or not it will work."

"Good! Now we'll turn some more soil."

At the north and south ends of the quarter section other tests were made which gave results

almost similar to the first, though the soil was not quite so moist.

“ See that tree with the cross blazed in the bark? ” Andy asked, as he pointed to a tree a rod away.

“ Yes, ” answered the boys.

“ That’s your corner mark. If you go close, you will see an E 1, N.E. cut below the blaze. That means that your section is mapped as E 1 and that this is the northeast boundary. You’ll find marks at the three other corners. Don’t cut those trees down or deface the marks; there’s a fine of two hundred and fifty dollars or six months’ imprisonment, or both, for destroying a corner mark placed by the government. Where there are no trees, stone posts are set up.”

“ Do you mean that all this region has been surveyed? ” asked Phil.

“ It has, and mapped as well. At the Land Office you can buy maps of all the lands open for homestead entry, marked even into forty-acre lots, with a list of all the people who have filed entries and the locations of their claims.”

“ That’s some job, surveying and running lines, ” commented Ted.

“ It sure is, especially when the land must be examined for coal and mineral deposits, and the

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work is carried on, or has been completed, in all the prairie and Rocky Mountain States. You Easterners have no idea of the importance of the Department of the Interior, which has charge of the public lands."

"The only time we ever hear of it is when some land-grabbing scandal breaks out," Phil declared.

"And the worst ones never have leaked out. But it's getting harder for the rich syndicates to gobble up square mile after square mile of valuable land. Some day it will be impossible, and no more priceless water rights will be given away."

"But how can the syndicates get the land, when a homesteader is only allowed to file for a hundred and sixty or, under certain conditions, three hundred and twenty acres at the most?" queried Ted.

"By getting individuals to file entries, and when they have received the land, turn it over to the syndicates."

The fervour with which their companion spoke surprised his hearers, and Phil asked, guilelessly:

"You have been in the reclamation service, haven't you?"



Casting a swift glance at his questioner, Andy flushed and snapped a curt “ Yes.”

“ Why did you leave it? ”

Again their companion flushed, but this time angrily.

“ They didn’t want an honest man on my job — but I spoiled their game, just the same. Please not ask any more about my service. The business isn’t ended yet.”

“ I hope you’ll win! ” exclaimed Ted, impulsively.

“ It isn’t myself I care about. I hate to see a few rich thieves, in and out of office — and when any one tells you that land can be stolen without the knowledge of the high officials, don’t you believe them — get for nothing rights that are too valuable even to sell.”

With this outburst Andy grew silent, and it was not until they had inspected the brook, where Ted found conditions favourable for the installation of his system, that he recovered his cheeriness.

“ Think you can sleep in such a place? ” he asked, as he fixed the fire after returning to the bough hut.

“ I don’t mind the place. It’s the sleeping on my guns that will bother me,” Ted replied. “ I don’t think they will be very comfortable.”

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“That only means to have them under your pillows.”

“But we haven’t any pillows.”

“Use your saddles.” And Andy quickly showed the boys how to build a bed of boughs, and cover it with their blankets in such a way that the hardness of their saddles was relieved.

When they had gathered a big pile of firewood for the night, Andy suggested target practice.

With a shout the boys welcomed the suggestion, and while the agent set up a tin can some thirty paces from the bough hut, they broke out their rifles.

“You’re oldest, you shoot first,” said Ted to his brother.

“All right!” And throwing his rifle to his shoulder, Phil sighted it a moment, then fired.

To the surprise of the former member of the reclamation service, the can was torn from the branch which held it.

“Good boy, Phil! Do it again!” cried his brother, when he had replaced the target.

Three more times the boy fired, standing at different distances, and three more times the can went spinning.

“Thought you hadn’t shot much?” exclaimed Andy.

“ Nor have I. Only four or five times, before today, all told.”

“ H’m! Try it with your 44.”

The results with the revolver were as good, and their agent was both surprised and delighted.

“ No fluke about those bulls-eyes,” he declared. “ You are a natural-born marksman. You’ve the quick, sure eye.”

“ It’s his pitching that does it,” enthused Ted, as happy at his brother’s remarkable showing as though it had been himself. “ Phil was the star pitcher of the Interscholastic League, you know.”

“ That may have developed his eye, but he’s a natural-born marksman just the same. Now let’s see what you can do, Ted. Are you a pitcher, too? ”

“ No, I’m not,” replied the boy, as he squinted along the rifle barrel.

“ He’s going to build an airship when we get E 1 cleared,” laughed Phil.

The younger boy made a sorry showing, however, not scoring a hit though he emptied his magazine, and he had no better success with his 44.

“ Never mind, practice will develop your eye,” consoled Andy. “ And now we’ll get supper.”

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As night advanced, the woods seemed to awaken. Owls hooted, twigs snapped as night-prowling animals travelled about, and now and then the cry of a mountain lion sounded in the distance.

"I shan't dare shut my eyes tonight," exclaimed the younger boy.

"Nonsense!" returned their companion. "The fire will keep everything away. Don't think about the noises, just put your mind on the pleasantest thing you can conceive and forget that you are in the real woods."

More tired than they cared to admit, the young homesteaders lost no time in wrapping up in their blankets, after everything had been made shipshape for the night. But scarcely had they worked themselves into comfortable positions than a terrified whinneying and snorting burst from the horses.

Hastily throwing aside their covering, the boys snatched their revolvers from under their saddles and sprang to their feet.

"What is it, Andy?" they asked, excitedly, as they caught a glimpse, across the campfire, of their companion as he ran to the ponies.

"Bears, I reckon. I haven't heard a lion cry. But I don't know."



A frenzied thrashing and tramping, in addition to the snorting, put an end to any further exchange of opinions, and with one accord the three rushed toward the terrified animals.

“ Steady! Steady! ” soothed Andy, stepping among them.

But the horses refused to be quieted.

“ We’ve got our hands full this time, sure enough! Quick, put your bridles on! You can manage your ponies better. No, don’t unhobble — and hang on for dear life. If one of them gets away, there’ll be no catching him.”

So thoroughly frightened were the animals, however, that it was all Phil and Ted could do to bridle them, but at last they succeeded. Yet they found it no easy task to hold them even then, for they persisted in facing north, whirling back so rapidly whenever the boys turned them as nearly to break away.

“ What makes them do that? ” gasped Ted, out of breath from his exertions.

“ Because that is the direction from which the danger lies,” Andy replied.

“ But I can’t hear anything out there,” said Phil.

“ The ponies can smell it, though. That’s what makes me think it’s a bear. Horses can

smell a bear farther than anything else. You brought your rifles, didn't you?"

"No, the 44s."

"Then get your rifles, quick! You don't want to use a revolver at night. Besides, it wouldn't stop a bear any time."

"But we can't leave our ponies," protested Ted.

"Here, I'll hold Daisy while you hustle back and bring the rifles," ordered Andy.

Scarcely had the boy started than the horses whirled in the direction of the campfire, snorting and jerking back frantically, unable to rear because of their hobbles.

"Wow! they're on all sides of us!" cried Phil, but Andy was too busy trying to manage his two animals to reply.

"Hurry, Ted, hurry!" yelled his brother, as he saw that their companion had more than his hands full, all his own strength being required to hold Pat.

"Never mind the rifles! Come back!" added Andy.

But instead of seeing the boy return, they heard a wild shriek, then the crack of a rifle, quickly followed by four others, fired to the accompaniment of fiendish roars.

“ What is it? ” shouted Phil.

But no answer did he receive.

“ Quick! bind your reins around that sapling and give me the ends, then go see. Take my rifle. It’s slung across my back,” commanded Andy.

Trembling so at the thought of injury to his brother that he could hardly do what he was told, Phil finally managed to unsling the rifle and rushed toward the campfire, throwing the gun to his shoulder as he came within its light.

Just beyond the burning pile lay Ted, motionless, while scant fifteen feet from him a bear wallowed in his death throes.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### OUTFITTING

“**A**NDY! Andy! Come quick!” shouted Phil, as he leaped across the campfire and ran to his brother. “Ted! Ted! Are you hurt? Speak to me!” he implored, dropping to his knees beside the quiet form.

Fortunately the ponies, seeming to sense the fact that their danger was over, became quieter, and hastily the agent made them fast to the sapling, then rushed to the boy’s assistance.

“Jove! That was close work. He’s a monster. Did he tear Ted with his claws?”

“I don’t think so. I can’t find any wounds.”

By this time Andy himself was kneeling beside the still motionless lad, swiftly running his hands over his limbs to learn if any were broken.

“Thank goodness the bear didn’t cuff him with his paws. There isn’t a mark on him. Bring the coffee-pot. I think he has only fainted.”

Quickly Phil did as he was bidden, and Andy



raised Ted's head, opened his mouth, and poured a long draught of the strong black coffee down his throat.

"Rub his hands!" he commanded.

The treatment, however, did not revive the young homesteader.

"Oh, Andy, do *something!*" pleaded Phil.  
"He isn't d —"

But a vigorous sneeze by Ted stopped the dread word on his lips, for the agent had struck a match and held the sulphurous fumes to the boy's nose.

"That's the stuff!" cried Andy, in relief.  
"Another match and he'll be himself again."

"Ugh! Stop sticking matches up my nose," exclaimed Ted, sitting up. Then, as he recognized his surroundings, he asked: "Did I get him?"

"You sure did, and he's a monster," returned the agent.

"He was just reaching for our bacon when I caught sight of him. I'd got our rifles and was starting back when I heard a branch crack right beside me, and there was Mister Bear, standing on his hind legs, clawing at the bacon.

"I was so frightened, I just stood and shook. Then I let out a yell for you fellows. The bear

must have heard it, for he turned his head, then rushed for me and I fired. But he kept on coming and I kept firing. The last I remember, he seemed right on top of me. I'm sorry I fainted."

"Never mind. There are not many men who would have been able to shoot at all, seeing a bear so close and for the first time," returned the agent.

"Let's take a look at him," suggested Phil, when his brother was on his feet again. And quickly they reached the carcass.

While the young homesteaders pulled the long fur and examined the terrible claws, Andy was searching to find where the bullets had hit.

"That was some shooting, Ted," he finally announced; "five shots and every one in the head."

"Beats hitting a tin can, what?" said Phil.

"It certainly does, especially in the night, when it is always harder to hit a mark because things look bigger."

"Probably I couldn't do it again."

"You got him, though, and that's what counts."

"How much do you suppose he weighs?" asked Phil.

“Can’t tell exactly — about five hundred, I should think.”

“Guess I won’t have something to write home about, what?” cried Ted, and again the boys examined the black monster until they were called away by their companion.

“I don’t blame you for being proud of him. I had my first bear stuffed and sent home. But we can’t stay here all night. We’ve got to move,” cried Andy, who had been picking up their kits while the boys were admiring the prize.

“Move, at this hour?” exclaimed Phil, in amazement. “We can’t leave our hut.”

“That’s what. The horses are beginning to tread again, they smell the blood, and they wouldn’t give us a minute’s rest all night. But we won’t go far, just fifteen or twenty rods to leeward.”

Taking only the blankets, saddles, and fire-arms, they quickly found another suitable place close at hand where the wind would blow the scent away from them, and when they had lighted another fire they returned for the horses, which they finally managed to lead around the bear.

After about an hour they had calmed their mounts, and again they rolled up in their

blankets, falling into a sleep from which nothing aroused them.

“Get up, sleepyheads!” called Andy, as he set the coffee-pot on the coals and made ready to fry some bacon.

Aroused, the boys sat up, only to sink back, groaning.

“I’m too stiff to move. How do you feel, Ted?” inquired his brother.

“The only thing I can do without its hurting is open my eyes.”

“Try opening your mouths for some of this coffee,” laughed their companion, standing over them with the steaming pot, from which he poured a few drops onto their necks.

“Hey, quit that! Ouch, don’t!” yelled the young homesteaders, leaping to their feet under the smart of the hot liquid.

“Nothing like a shock to drive away the aches,” grinned Andy, and as the boys remembered how quickly they had forgotten their complaints of the moment before, they laughed with him.

“Go and rub down your ponies, that will take a few more kinks out of you,” their companion ordered, yet before they had finished, he called them to breakfast.



With a relish the boys ate.

"What's to do first?" inquired Phil.

"Skin the bear," returned Andy. "Then I'm going back to Chikau and you can do what you please, but I should advise you to go to Bradley and get your outfit. With proper tools you can begin work on your homestead in earnest. You will only be wasting time trying to accomplish anything with what you brought from Peleg's."

The thought of being left alone in a place so wild that bears roamed it, sobered the young homesteaders instantly.

"Can't you manage, *somehow*, to stay with us at least another day?" pleaded Ted, his eyes wandering unconsciously to where the huge fur-covered carcass lay.

"No, I can't," returned Andy, sharply. "You boys must start in on your own resources sometime, so the sooner the better."

"But you know so much about everything. We can learn more from you in a day than by ourselves in a week," flattered Phil.

"Now see here, none of that sort of talk."

"But it's true," protested Ted.

"Perhaps it is. But I learned mostly by experience, and so must you. Did you expect to

have some one do the work for you when you left home? ”

“ No,” chorused both boys, stung by his tone.

“ Then why should you change your minds just because you found me and was good enough to take an interest in you and come over here with you? ”

“ You are right, Andy,” exclaimed Phil, after a short pause.

“ That’s better. You boys have the stuff in you. The way you faced the Black Swede and the bear proves that. You are educated, you have studied upon farming and homesteading, and Ted, here, has at least mechanical knowledge if not genius. Left to yourselves, you *ought* to come out on top — but you never will if you are going to rely on some one else to solve all your difficulties.”

As they had finished breakfast while talking, without another word the young homesteaders arose, picked up and washed the dishes, after which they announced their readiness to go for their outfit.

Amused at their sudden independence, the agent asked:

“ Don’t you want me to show you how to skin the bear? ”

“ I’ve read up on that,” returned Phil. “ We can do it when we get back.”

“ Undoubtedly. But while I am with you, I shall give you the benefit of my experience,” smiled Andy. “ If you don’t dress the bear before you start, you will have trouble with the horses you are going to bring back. They’ll be afraid. Come on, let’s see you skin the beast, Phil.”

Thus put on his mettle, the elder boy took his hunting-knife, whetted it on his leather boots, went to the carcass, picked up one paw, inserted the knife, and slit the skin to the body, repeating the operation on the other three legs, then made a slit down the belly.

With now and then a word of direction, Andy watched, and soon the pelt had been removed. This done, the agent showed the boys how to cut up the meat and hang it on poles.

“ You said we could outfit in Bradley, didn’t you, Andy? ” asked Ted, when the task was ended.

“ I did.”

“ How do we get there? ”

“ Follow the brook until you come to a road, then follow that until you reach Bradley.”

“ Thank you. When will you be over again? ”

“As soon as I can. Come on, I’ll see you started.”

And when the ponies were saddled, the young homesteaders bade the agent good-bye, shouting their thanks to him as they rode away.

With very little trouble they were able to keep along the brook, reaching the road in due course, and noon found them riding down the main, and only, street of Bradley.

A mushroom town built to cater to the desires of the lumberjacks from three near-by camps, and the handful of settlers; there were more public houses and dance halls than anything else, among which was tucked the inevitable “general store,” and before this they drew rein.

Several loungers seated on the store porch sat up and took notice as the boys made their ponies fast.

“Orphans’ home is first street to the left,” drawled one of them.

Phil flashed upon him what he intended to be a look of contempt.

“Look out, Bill, that’s young ‘Eat-em-alive,’ ” grinned another loafer, rising and advancing toward the boys.

The proprietor of the store, however, had



chanced to hear the loafers' remarks, and, hurrying to learn their cause, arrived just as the young homesteaders entered the door.

Struck by the clean-cut and manly appearance of the boys, he ordered the bullies to be quiet, then asked:

"What can I do for you, gents?"

"We want a homesteader's outfit," replied Phil.

The words evoked loud guffaws from the loungers.

"For whom?" asked the store-keeper.

"Ourselves!" snapped Ted.

"Where have you filed?"

"Can't we buy what we wish without giving our history?" demanded Phil.

"Say, do you think I'm letting an outfit go without knowing where it's going?" snorted the proprietor. "How could I collect?"

"We intend to pay cash," announced Ted.

This statement evoked even more surprise from those who had heard it than anything that had happened before, and the loungers commented freely upon it.

To the boys' relief, however, it turned the store-keeper from a "doubting Thomas" to an eager salesman. And straightway he bustled

about, dragging out plows, harrows, cultivators, chains, hoes, rakes, and the many other things needed to work the ground and furnish the cabin.

Determined not to be denied some fun from baiting the boys, the loungers advised the purchase of all sorts of useless implements, drawing upon their imaginations for instances when the possession of such and such a tool would have spelled the difference between success and failure to themselves or friends. But Phil and Ted paid them no more heed than as if they had not been within a hundred miles.

Selecting only the best, the outfit was at last complete, even to the seed, included in which Ted insisted upon having some "durum" wheat, much to the amusement of the proprietor.

"How much do we owe you?" asked Ted, drawing out his pocket-book.

"Hundred and sixty-five dollars," said the store-keeper, after adding up the amounts.

"That means a hundred and forty-eight dollars and a half, allowing us the usual discount for cash," said Phil. "Pay him, Ted. Kindly give us a receipt, please."

Several times the proprietor opened his mouth to protest, but the sight of the money in the

younger boy's hands and the chuckles of the loafers caused him to shut it each time in silence, and, as though in a daze, he passed over a receipt.

"How on earth are you going to get all these things home?" asked one of the bullies. "You can't load them on your ponies."

"In a wagon, of course," exclaimed Phil.

"But you haven't any."

"Not yet, but we're going to buy one." And he led the way from the store, followed by the loungers, mounted, and rode up the street, stopping at a big barn.

As the conclave halted, a loud voice called:

"Hey, Sam Turner, here are a couple of babies want a go-cart."

The words brought the horse-dealer and hostlers to the door on the run.

Before any of them could speak, however, Phil said:

"We want to buy a pair of horses, a wagon, and harnesses."

"Entrymen?" grinned the horse-dealer.

"We are," smiled Phil.

"Where's the claim?"

"We are friends of Si Hopkins," declared Ted.

“Will he sign the mortgage?”

“We aren’t giving a mortgage — that is, how much do you want for the horses and wagon, Mr. Turner?” asked the younger boy.

“H’m! Let me see. You’ll want time, of course, even if Si is back of you. Money’s high now, so I ought to get four hundred and fifty dollars, one hundred down, the balance fifty every three months.”

“We haven’t asked for time, sir,” exclaimed Phil curtly. “Come, Ted, let’s see if we can’t get horses of some one who doesn’t charge three or four prices.”

“If you knew Sam as well as I do, you wouldn’t mind his trying to be a robber,” exclaimed a hanger on.

“We’ll give you just two hundred and seventy-five dollars in cash, Mr. Turner. Take it or leave it.”

“Make it three hundred and you can take the team with you.”

“Two hundred and seventy-five, I said,” returned Phil.

“They’re yours, for cash.”

“Write out the receipt, then,” exclaimed the elder boy, and Ted again counted out the money.

“That only leaves us one hundred and fifteen



dollars until harvest time," he said as the horse-dealer went away to get the team. "Wouldn't it be best to buy on time, after all?"

"No, it wouldn't. Mr. Hopkins said that is the way so many settlers lose out. These traders are sharpers, and if a man lacks five cents of the amount for a payment, they'll take everything away from him."

As Turner exchanged the receipt for the money, the boys hurried to inspect their latest purchases, and loud were they in their admiration of the powerful blacks.

"Are they vicious?" inquired Phil, cautiously, visions of trouble in harnessing and unharnessing such big creatures before his eyes.

"Gentle as lambs. Only thing you have to look out for is that they don't step on you."

"Better let us hitch 'em, Mr. Turner," said Ted. "We've got to learn how sometime."

With a smile, the horse-dealer agreed; and he explained which was the nigh and which the off horse, and showed them how to handle the heavy harnesses.

Two or three trials, however, was necessary before the young homesteaders could harness and hitch in properly. At last, with Daisy and Pat on lead ropes, they drove from the barn and

up to the store, where their purchases were duly loaded into the stout farm wagon.

Several men were lounging about when Phil and Ted drove up, and they commented freely upon the horses and the whole outfit, watching the boys closely.

"Hope you need something more soon. I like cash customers," smiled the store-keeper, as he placed the last package on the wagon.

"Aren't you going to eat before you start back?" asked Turner, who had ridden up to look the boys' equipment over.

"Can't. We haven't any money left," laughed Phil.

"Then Sam and I will set up the dinners," declared the store-keeper.

The boys, however, declined, and starting their blacks were soon out of sight.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A DAY OF TRIALS

“**C**OME on, speed up, Phil, they can’t see from the store if anything goes wrong now,” declared Ted, after a glance over his shoulder.

But the elder boy gave no heed to his brother’s request. Indeed, it had been with many misgivings as to what the big, powerful black horses might do that he had picked up the reins, for driving had not come within the range of either of the boy’s experiences in Weston. The horses, however, had been content to walk from the barn to the store and even more willing after the wagon had been loaded, much to Phil’s delight. Consequently he had been able to handle them without difficulty.

For several minutes after his call for a faster gait, Ted kept silent, then exclaimed:

“If you are afraid, let me drive. We won’t get home till dark if we don’t move faster.”

“What if we don’t! It’s better to get home all right than to have the blacks run away.”

“Run away! Fiddlesticks! Can’t horses trot without running away?” And before Phil could protest, Ted clucked to the blacks.

Instantly they responded, breaking into a smart trot, causing the tools and boxes to rattle and bounce, making a surprising racket.

Alarmed at the noise, the horses, in the evident endeavour to get away from the strange sounds, went faster and faster, finally breaking into a run.

His face very white, Phil braced his feet and pulled with all his might on the reins. But the blacks kept on running.

So rough was the road that the boys bounced about on the seat as though they were pebbles, several times almost falling off.

Two or three times, Ted opened his mouth to speak, only to bite his tongue as the wagon gave a particularly vicious bounce, but at last he yelled “Whoa!” and the horses stopped with a suddenness that flung both boys to the ground.

Quickly they picked themselves up, Phil still holding the reins.

“I’ve a good mind to make you walk home,” he called. “*I* knew what would happen. You keep quiet while *I’m* driving. When I want to



trot I will.” And when they both had regained the seat, he quietly started the blacks again.

“There’s no need of getting stuffy about it,” chuckled his brother. “You could have stopped them any time by saying ‘whoa.’ Just remember that — if you are ever driving alone, which you won’t be, with my permission.

“Good thing the blacks are well trained or they would be running yet, for all you would have — ”

“Oh, keep quiet!” snapped Phil. And with another chuckle the younger boy subsided.

For several miles they proceeded in silence.

“Wonder how much farther it is to the brook where we turn off,” Phil said, at last.

“Can’t be more than a couple of miles. Why?”

“Because I think we’d better hurry, so we can make everything shipshape before night.”

“Then let me drive; if the horses run away again we may pass the brook.” And snatching the reins, Ted put the blacks into a smart trot.

In vain Phil protested, but his brother only bade him sit tight and not bounce off the seat — a thing which they both found difficulty not to do, for the road grew rougher every rod.

“T-there’s t-the br-rook,” stammered the

elder boy, suddenly. "For goodness' sake, slow up. There isn't any road at all through the woods."

"Can't be much rougher than this," grinned his brother, but nevertheless he drew in the blacks and, bracing himself, reined into the brush beside the brook.

Not a whit did the horses relish forcing their way through the young growth, and fortunate it was for the boys that they were well trained, as Ted managed them more by speaking to them than by the reins.

With the wagon pitching and tossing, now one side up so high it was in danger of tipping over, then the other, the horses plunged ahead until they came to a heavy growth of trees so close together that even the boys, inexperienced as they were, realized that the wagon could never pass between them.

"We're in a pretty fix, now," exclaimed Phil, as the blacks stopped of their own accord. "I suppose we shall have to cut down some of those trees before we can go any farther. And from the looks of them, it will be night before we do it. I think Andy should have stayed with us. He must have known we couldn't drive home."

"And *I'm* going to show him we can," re-

turned Ted, taking a fresh grip on the reins and bracing his feet carefully.

“How?”

“Just sit tight and don’t ask questions.” And before Phil could say another word, the boy started the horses, reining them sharply to one side, straight for the brook.

“Hold on! Stop! Are you crazy?” demanded his brother, reaching for the reins.

“*You* keep quiet, now,” retorted Ted. “We rode down the brook, didn’t we? Well, I happened to notice its bed was almost level, so —”

But the blacks put a stop to his words by halting at the edge of the water, snorting and plunging.

“There! Those horses have sense enough to know they can’t drag this wagon up the brook if you haven’t,” exclaimed Phil. “We’ll tie them, get our axes, and cut out a road.”

“All right, go ahead, if you want to. Better take out some grub, though. You couldn’t cut a road in a week. *I’m* going up to camp and *I’m* going to drive up. Come on, you beauties! Steady, now! Giddap!” And he slapped the blacks sharply with the reins.

For an instant the horses teetered; quivering,

they leaped forward, lifting the wagon from the ground.

“Steady! None of that!” soothed Ted. And as they stepped into the brook, he went on: “That isn’t so bad, is it? Go on, now.”

Apparently finding that the water flowing against their legs was not an unpleasant feeling, the blacks advanced cautiously, pausing every now and then, only to resume their way as they heard Ted’s voice reassuring them.

With reins tight, and looking steadily ahead to guard against holes, the boy guided the horses through the brook until the heavily wooded land had been passed, when he again reined them onto land. Twice more was it necessary to take to the brook before they reached their shake-down, which they finally did without mishap.

“Phew! I wouldn’t go through that again for a good deal,” exclaimed Phil, as he sprang to the ground in front of the bough hut. “I’m as weak as a rag.”

“It wasn’t much fun, I’ll admit,” answered Ted. “But, fortunately, we won’t need to go out again until we have cut a road. We’ll unharness and then get something to eat. I’m hungry as a bear.”

Slowly and awkwardly the young home-



steads went about the task of unhitching the blacks, but at last they managed to pull off the heavy harnesses, put on the halters, made them fast to some stout saplings and fed them. But instead of tying the saddle ponies, they hobbled them — discrimination which the blacks resented.

“ Shall we unload first and then eat or eat and then unload? ” asked Phil, after they had hung the heavy harnesses in a tree beside the hut.

“ Eat,” decided his brother, “ though you can be taking out some of the lighter things while I am frying the bacon and eggs, if you want to.”

“ Which I don’t. I’ll boil the coffee.” And laughing over the stories the loungers at the store had told them, the boys cooked their meal and ate it ravenously.

Refreshed by the food, they made but short work of the unloading, and when everything was safely stowed away, they started out to plan their next day’s work, having agreed that first they should clear and plant some land for their vegetable garden and then build their irrigation system.

After examining several locations, they finally selected one on the east side of the section, where the ground held sufficient natural moisture to insure good crops.

On the spot, however, there was a fairly heavy growth of underbrush.

“Let’s get our axes and begin cutting today,” suggested the elder boy. “We can’t afford to waste any time. By the looks of this brush, it will take us two or three days to chop it out, at the least.”

“Wish we had a piece of iron rail, then we could hitch the blacks, one at each end, and drag it, like Mr. Hopkins told us. That would save a lot of work,” returned Ted.

“But we haven’t, so we must do it the best way we can. Come on, let’s see how much we can clear before dark.”

Eager to begin work on the homestead which was to mean so much to them and the little mother back in Weston, the boys set out for their axes. But when they came in sight of their camp, they forgot about them.

“One of the blacks is gone!” cried Ted, stopping short and staring in amazement at the sapling to which the horse had been tied.

“Bet he was the one you hitched,” exclaimed Phil.

“Bet he wasn’t. *I* know how to tie a knot a horse can’t pull out.”

“So do I.”

While they were talking, the boys were running toward the remaining black, and as they reached it, Ted glanced at the loop about the tree and cried:

“I knew it was the one you tied! See that double knot here? That’s the kind to hold. Come here and I’ll show you how to tie it.”

“Well, there’s no good in rubbing it in. He probably hasn’t gone very far. Get some oats in a pan and we’ll go after him.”

Quickly Ted obeyed, and having found where the horse entered the woods, they started in pursuit, expecting to come upon him browsing. When, however, at the end of half an hour they had failed to catch even a glimpse of the black, they halted.

“You don’t suppose he has gone back to Bradley, do you?” asked Ted.

“I should think he would have taken the way we came in, if he has. Instead, he seems to have gone in the opposite direction.”

“Which makes me think we’d better begin breaking branches to mark our own trail or we’ll never be able to find our own way back.”

“Oh, we can follow the hoof-prints, all right.”

“While we can see them, but it won’t be more than a couple of hours before it is dark.”

The thought that they were in a fair way to be caught in the woods by night seemed to come to both boys at once, and they glanced at one another apprehensively.

Taking out his watch, Phil looked at it.

"It's half-past four," he said. "Suppose we hunt for another half-hour, marking our trail, and then, if we don't find him, go back?"

"Why not go back now, saddle the ponies, and start out again? We must find the black. We haven't enough money to buy another horse and, besides, we can travel faster on the ponies."

As this seemed a good suggestion, Phil readily agreed. Making all possible haste, the young homesteaders retraced their steps much faster than they had taken them, being careful to mark the trail by breaking branches and soon were mounted and again on the search.

Returned to the spot whence they had gone back, they separated and rode some hundred feet apart that they might search a broader area.

In silence, save for the creaking of their saddle leathers and the tramp of their mounts, they proceeded until Phil suddenly called:

"I can see a house over here to the right."

"Didn't know we had any neighbours so near," returned his brother as, riding over, he gazed



in the direction Phil pointed. "Queer Andy didn't tell us. Perhaps the black has gone there."

Shaking out their ponies, the boys were soon at the door of a weather-beaten log-cabin, and as they dismounted an old man came round the corner, eying them suspiciously.

"Have you seen a black horse with a halter?" asked Phil, ignoring the hostile looks that the man bestowed on them.

"No, I ain't. I only got two horses and *they're* brown, so you can't work that game on me. If you don't want to get into trouble, you'd better be going. You can't —"

"We are in trouble enough without getting into any more. Come on Phil," interrupted Ted.

"That's right, be off. You can't play any horse-stealing tricks on me," snarled the old man.

"*Horse-stealing!*" repeated Phil, "why, we've *lost* one of our new horses that we bought in Bradley this morning. We are not trying to steal any."

Fortunately for the young homesteaders before they could get into further argument with the old man, they were joined by a girl so redolent with health and so pretty that the boys stared at her in speechless amazement.

"What is it, Pap?" she asked, noting the scowl on her father's face.

"These fellers *claims* to be looking for a black horse they say —"

"Did he have a new halter?" quickly interrupted the girl, turning to Phil.

"Yes. Have you seen him? Tell us where, please. We must get home before dark."

"I don't know as it was *your* horse. I saw Lem Petersen leading a big black, with a brand-new halter, toward his place."

"Thank you *ever* so much." And Phil whirled his pony.

Ted, however, was less affected by the blue eyes that gazed on them and asked:

"In which direction does Petersen live?"

"Better not go to Lem's unless you can prove it's your horse," counselled the old man. "*He* won't stand any nonsense."

"I guess we know the horse we bought," exclaimed the elder boy, impatiently. "Tell us, please, where this man lives."

"About four mile over that way, southwest," replied the man, pointing.

"But how do we get there? Where is the road, I mean?" inquired Phil.

"Why don't you ride over with them, Pap?"

You know Lem. Mebbe you can help get the horse back," suggested the girl.

"Sure, I know *Lem*, but I don't know these fellers and I don't know they bought or lost a horse. I —"

"Won't you take our word for it?" demanded Phil.

"If Mr. Hopkins were here to back us up or even Andy Howe, I guess it would make a difference, wouldn't it?" asked Ted.

"You know Si?" inquired the old man, in less hostile tones.

"We do. These are his ponies. He loaned them to us until we get our homestead cleared."

"So you're entrymen, eh? Anywhere near here?"

"E 1."

"Well now, ain't that funny? This is E 2. I ain't heerd of any one coming onto E 1."

"That is not surprising in view of the fact that we got here only yesterday," returned Phil, adding a brief account of how they happened to have lost the black.

"Come on, Pap, we'll *both* go," announced the girl, as the boy finished, and, running to the barn, she quickly returned, mounted on a big roan and leading another.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### AN ECHO FROM THE PAST

**T**HOUGH he little relished the errand, the old man yielded to his daughter's pleading, and they were quickly galloping toward Petersen's "quarter," Phil riding beside the girl and the other two close behind them.

"I mistrusted something was wrong when I saw Lem leading that horse," said the girl. "He doesn't buy horses."

"How does he get them?" inquired her companion, his tone evidencing his surprise at the statement. "He doesn't steal them, does he?"

"Not exactly. That is, Lem says it ain't stealing, but I say it's just the same. He lends money, and when the people can't pay, he takes their horses. But I saw this black was fat and sleek, so I knew it hadn't been worked any."

"Nice sort of a person this Petersen seems to be," commented Phil.

"He's a bad man. I wouldn't trust him as far as I could see his shadow at noon. But he's



got into trouble with the forest fire patrol. They think he set a couple of fires last summer and they are watching him all the time, though he doesn't know it. They've only got to keep watching him long enough and they'll get him. And when the patrol gets him, his money won't save him."

"Easy, gal, easy," cautioned her father. "We're liable to run across him anywhere now and he's too handy with his matches to have him get any more angry at us than he is."

These words, suggesting as they did the old man's fear that Petersen might seek revenge by burning his buildings, gave the boys their first intimation of the danger attending the quest of the black to the girl and her father, and Phil quickly said:

"You mustn't come another step with us. We can find the way, all right, and not for worlds would we have any trouble come to you through us." But neither the old man nor the girl drew rein, and the boy asked:

"Won't you *please* go back?"

"No, we won't," snapped the girl. "Pap's always afraid Lem will burn us up, but I tell him Lem daresn't."

Finding that they could not dissuade their

companions, the boys rode on, but Phil took good care to turn the conversation into other channels, regaling the girl with an account of their experiences in purchasing their outfit, and the drive back to the camp.

Well did this serve to take the homesteaders' minds from the risk they were running, and they were laughing and joking about the loungers' advice when a man suddenly stepped from the underbrush into the road in front of them.

"What you riding on my quarter for, Jasper?" he demanded. "Ain't I told you to keep offen it?"

At the words and the menacing manner of the man, the four had pulled in their mounts.

"We was looking for a black hoss, Lem, and the law says a man ain't trespassing when he's hunting his livestock," retorted the old man, sharply.

"What makes you think he come this way?"

"Because I saw you leading him," exclaimed the girl.

"That warn't a black, that was my dapple bay."

"Just as if I didn't know the difference between a dapple bay and a black, Lem Petersen," snapped the girl. "These boys have lost a

black, with a new halter like the one you was leading. Better give it back to them — and save trouble.”

“ I tell you, I ain’t — ” began Petersen, angrily, only to be interrupted by a loud whinny from the heavy brush to the right of the group.

Like a flash Ted leaped his pony into the undergrowth, and before the others could follow, he shouted:

“ Here he is. Here’s our black tied to a tree. Wait there and I’ll lead him out.”

“ You leave that horse be! ” roared Petersen. “ He’s mine. I bought him from — ”

“ Never knew you to *buy* a horse, Lem. Thought you boasted you didn’t have to ’cause you could always get enough for debt,” broke in the old man.

This thrust seemed to render Petersen speechless with fury, and before he could find words to express himself, Ted reappeared, leading the runaway black.

“ Dapple bay, is it? You’d better have your eyes examined, Lem,” taunted the girl.

In the face of the discovery that he had lied, Petersen screamed:

“ You drop that halter. That’s my horse. I took him from Joe Hunt for debt. If you don’t

let him go, I'll have you arrested for hoss-stealing."

But the old man paid him no heed. Instead he asked Phil:

"Is that the horse you lost?"

"It certainly is."

"Then come on. We'll lead him back. You young folks ride ahead. None o' that, Lem," he added harshly, as the fellow's hand dropped to his hip-pocket. "Murder would be goin' too far — even for you."

An instant Petersen glowered at the old man who faced him so fearlessly, then snarled:

"But I tell you I got that black from Joe Hunt. I ain't going to let an old numbskull like you beat me out of him, neither."

"You know —" began the girl, but she was quickly silenced by her father.

"Let *me* do the talking, gal. Look a here, Lem, that horse ain't never been worked and you know it. If Joe Hunt had a horse like that, he wouldn't feed it for a week. He'd figger he could live on his fat that length of time."

Petersen opened his mouth to reply, when Phil said:

"It is a simple matter to prove the ownership. We'll lead him over to this gentleman's



tonight and tomorrow we will ride into Bradley and bring back Sam Turner, from whom we bought the black. *He* would certainly recognize one of the horses he sold us."

"There, that's fair, Lem," declared the old man. "Course, the hoss might have been Joe Hunt's, though it would be the *first* time he ever had a decent one, but Sam Turner will know if he sold him to these homesteaders. You know me well enough to know the black will be safe in my barn."

Expecting an explosion of wrath, the others were amazed to hear Petersen break into a loud laugh.

"Say, you folks can't take a joke, nohow, can you?" he gasped between bursts of forced merriment. "I was just 'stringing' you along, Jasper. I wanted to see how far you'd go. I found the horse grazing beside the road. Realizing he had broken loose and seeing he was valuable, I was taking him home to keep till the owner showed up. When I saw you coming, I knew these kids was the owners and I thought I'd have a little fun."

One and all who heard this explanation realized it was a clever lie to get himself out of an unpleasant predicament, but the old man said:

"All right, Lem. You've had your joke and we have the hoss. Now we'll be going."

And without more ado they put their mounts to a trot, Ted still leading the black. But as they retraced their course, they commented sharply upon Petersen's words and actions.

Arrived at the weather-beaten log cabin, the young homesteaders thanked the girl and her father heartily for their assistance, and turned their horses to go back to their camp.

"But you mustn't go home till after supper," protested the girl.

"Sure not," chimed in the old man, taking his cue from his daughter. "Joy's one rare, fine cook."

"Thank you, but it will be too dark then for us to find our way back," returned Phil, though in a voice that proved his desire to accept.

"Then Pap and I'll ride over with you, or you can stay till morning."

"We couldn't think of putting you to so much —" began Phil, when his brother exclaimed:

"Oh, let's stay. My mouth is watering for something good to eat. I'm tired of bacon and eggs, and I've only been eating them for a couple of days."

Ted's ingenuousness sent them into a gale of laughter, and with one accord they all rode to the barn, where the horses were put up, after which they returned to the cabin, and the boys watched eagerly while Joy brought out pies, cakes and other toothsome dainties and set them on the table.

"Land sakes, here we be, entertaining comp'ny, and we don't even know their names," exclaimed the old man, after they had been eating for some time.

"We were too excited to remember to introduce ourselves," apologized the elder boy. "Our name is Porter. This is my brother, Ted, and I am Phil."

"Oh, what a lovely name," exclaimed the girl, and then, blushing in confusion, she added hastily: "Ours is Jay. They call Pap Jasper and me Joy."

The glance that Phil gave the girl showed he thought the name most appropriate, though he sensibly refrained from saying so, but Ted gave him a wink to let him understand he read his mind.

Happy in the thought of such unexpected companionship, the young people laughed and chatted, oblivious of Mr. Jay and the intentness with which he scrutinized the boys.

All at once, during a pause in conversation, their attention was drawn to the old man.

“You look like him, yet you don’t,” Jay murmured to himself; then leaning forward, he asked suddenly: “Be you any relation to Winthrop Porter?”

For a moment the boys stared at the old man in silence.

“Why, he was our father,” finally replied Phil.

“Glory be! I’ve found ’em at last! I’ve found ’em at last!” cried the old settler, in delight. “Just to think it was Porter’s boys I helped get their horse from Lem. That pays part of my debt and this will make up the balance, though I don’t reckon it will mean to you what it did to me.”

And fumbling in his pocket, Mr. Jay drew out an old and worn wallet, from which he took two hundred-dollar bills which he handed to Phil.

“I — I don’t understand,” returned the boy, gazing from the soiled bills to the old settler and then at the others.

“Thirty year ago, Winthrop Porter grubstaked me for two hundred. It’s a long story. But it gave me and Melissie our start. For five year I’ve been carrying them bills against



meeting some one who could tell me where Winthrop Porter was. Joy, she writ when I first had 'em, but the letter was sent back stamped 'Not known,' so I callated he'd moved. Now me and Winthrop Porter is square, 's fur as money is concerned."

"But we can't take this money, Mr. Jay," protested Phil, recovering from his amazement. "If father let you have it, he gave it to you, he didn't lend it."

"Sure you will take it," flared the old settler.

"Why not let the matter rest for a while?" suggested Ted.

"No. I want it settled right now."

"Well, we won't take it," declared Phil; then seeing the protest in Mr. Jay's eyes, he added: "Please don't ask us to. Father wouldn't like to have us." And he held out the money.

A moment the old settler hesitated, then took it.

"Glory be, Joy! I can git that reaper now," he exclaimed.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### BUILDING AN IRRIGATION PLANT

**T**HE discovery that the Porters and Jays were really old friends opened a floodgate of questions and answers, and the boys were telling of their hopes and ambitions, when there sounded footsteps on the gravel walk, and as they all turned toward the door, it was opened and in walked Andy.

“How in the world did you know where to find us?” exclaimed Phil, after the agent had exchanged greetings with Joy and her father.

“Or weren’t you looking for *us*?” asked Ted, with an impish grin.

“Oh, it wasn’t difficult,” smiled Andy. “When I found only one horse at your camp, I imagined the other had got away and that you had gone after it, and I knew you couldn’t travel very far without striking Jasper’s. Did you find the other black?”

In answer, Joy gave a graphic account of the meeting with Petersen, which caused the agent’s

face to grow serious, for he realized the danger to the Jays from drawing Petersen's wrath. But with a swift glance of understanding at Jasper, he kept his thoughts to himself, and soon the boys launched on another recounting of their trips to and from Bradley.

At last Phil chanced to look at the clock.

"Dear me, I had no idea it was ten o'clock," he exclaimed. "We've had a very happy time, finding a friend of father's. And, Joy, I never ate food that tasted so good. I hope you'll ask us to come again."

"The latchstring is always out to any of Winthrop Porter's folks," declared Mr. Jay, heartily. "It will do Joy good to have some young people about. I try to do what I can, but I'm old and I know she's lonesome, though she wouldn't admit it."

"The idea, Pap, me lonesome with you and all the work and the hens and cows and horses," and the girl put her arm affectionately about her father's shoulders and stroked his hair.

"Well, we'll be over again soon and thank you again for going to Lem's with us. Good-night." And Phil advanced to shake Joy's hand.

"Where you going?" dryly inquired Andy.

"Why, back to camp, of course."

“ Oh, I guess Jasper can find a place for us.” In amazement, the boys looked at him and he quickly added: “ It’s too dark to tramp through the woods tonight.”

Had the boys paused to think, they would have realized that to a man accustomed to roam the woods, this excuse was very flimsy, but they accepted it readily.

“ Will it do to leave the other black there alone? ” asked Ted.

“ He isn’t there,” Andy replied. Then, in response to the looks of alarm which spread over the boys’ faces, he added: “ I brought him over with me. He’s out in your barn now, Jasper.”

“ And we never heard you — that’s b— ” began Mr. Jay.

“ You were laughing and talking too much,” interrupted Andy. “ Joy, just tell us where we are to sleep. We must be up early, we’ve a lot to do tomorrow.”

Quickly Joy disappeared into the other room the cabin held downstairs, and when she reappeared she announced that all was ready for the guests, and with hearty “ good-nights ” they retired.

Wearied by the events of the day, the young homesteaders quickly fell asleep, and when he



was sure of the fact, Andy arose, joining Jasper outside the cabin, and together they guarded the buildings against any attempt at revenge on Petersen's part.

No mention did either of the men make of their vigil, and after a delicious breakfast the agent and the boys returned to E 1.

"So long as I am here, we'd better build your irrigation plant," announced Andy when they arrived at the camp.

"But we won't need to irrigate this year, shall we?" queried Ted.

"Depends on the season. According to the signs, I think it's going to be hot and dry. Anyhow, it won't do any harm to have the plant ready, and we can put it in in a few days and at less cost than you could hire any one else next year or the year after. Besides, you won't be obliged to make a long haul with the necessary timber."

Readily the young homesteaders assented and accompanied Andy to the west clearing, where they chopped a few trees, then harnessed the blacks and drove over to Steve's camp and had them sawed into planks.

All that day and the next was consumed in hauling the lumber Steve sawed out for them, for

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the boys bought several loads rather than to take the time necessary to cut trees and draw them from their quarter.

“The first thing for you to do,” said the agent, when they returned to E 1 with the last load of planks, “is to decide where you want your dam. While the creek usually runs freely, you’ll need a reservoir to give a head sufficient to cover the fields on this side. So we’ll look it over.”

“Mr. Hopkins said the grade was just as important as the head,” Ted remarked, as they followed the edge of the stream.

“So it is. But that applies more to the laying out of the laterals, or branch ditches, than to the reservoir. The higher you have that, the greater your fall of water and the more land you can cover.”

“Then why not build the dam as close to our line as we can?” asked Phil.

“Say, you boys are ‘catching on’ like good ones,” praised Andy. “That’s just the thing to do.” And when they reached the boundary of the section, he showed them with how little work, thanks to the lay of the land, a reservoir a hundred feet long and as wide could be built.

This decided upon, they returned to the clear-

ing, where the agent constructed a simple level to establish the grade. Taking three pieces of board, he cut one to the length of  $16\frac{1}{2}$  feet and another to 3 feet and 4 inches.

“The grade of the land is about 1 inch to the rod on this west side,” said Andy, “and that is the only one you will have to irrigate.” Then he drew out a table showing the number of miner’s inches a ditch carrying a 6-inch head of water would discharge. For the grade of 1 inch per rod, this proved to be 37 miner’s inches, or .93 cubic feet per second, for the ordinary-sized ditch having a 14-inch width at the bottom and a mean depth of 5 inches.

“What’s a ‘miner’s inch’?” asked Phil.

“It’s the most common method of measuring water for irrigation purposes. I’ve been making an apparatus to measure the water flow, and I can show you by working it better than by explaining. But just let me finish this grader first.”

As Andy had found the grade to be 1 inch per rod, he cut the third board to a length of 3 feet and 5 inches, then nailed it firmly to one end of a long board, and the 3-foot 4-inch piece to the other. This done, he put a strip of 1-inch board under the shorter leg, then bound a car-

penter's spirit level to the centre of the long board.

"You carry this carefully, Ted," he ordered, giving the home-made grader to the boy. "I'll get my measuring board, and then we'll go back to where we are intending to put in the dam."

Interestedly the young homesteaders inspected the latter piece of apparatus after they had reached the site of the reservoir. It consisted of a board 1 inch thick, 12 inches wide, and 8 feet long. In this had been cut an opening 50 inches long and 6 inches wide, the centre of the slot, on the upstream side, being 4 inches from the top of the board, while the down-stream side was bevelled to present a sharp edge to the water.

A second 12-inch board, with one end fashioned into a handle, was placed against the upstream side of the slot and so hung upon the first board that it could be shoved back and forth. On the down-stream side of the opening, a bevelled block was fitted and screwed to the second board, and the inches were marked.

Placing the apparatus in the creek so that it dammed it, the water quickly flowed over the top.

"Pull that handle back until the block is at



the 12-inch mark along the slot," directed Andy. As Phil did so, the water fell below the top of the board.

"Now shove it back until the water is level with the top," the agent ordered. And when it had been done, Ted said the block was at the 6-inch mark.

"The number of miner's inches flowing through the slot is equal to the total square inches in the opening, that is, near enough for all practical purposes in a small stream like this," explained Andy.

"Why, that makes 36 miner's inches," said Phil. "What was the use of doing all this when the table showed 37 miner's inches, with a 6-inch head, for a grade of 1 inch per rod?"

"To show you how to measure miner's inches and to determine a supply of water when you do not know it, in case you should ever want to."

"Then you won't need to build a reservoir?" said Ted.

"Why not? This simply proves that the brook has a natural flow of about 37 miner's inches." Then taking out another table, he read: "One miner's inch equals .02 cubic feet per second; 1.2 cubic feet per minute; 72 cubic feet per hour. Now an acre-inch of water, or water to

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cover the surface of an acre of ground to the depth of 1 inch, equals 3630 cubic feet, which 1 miner's inch will supply in approximately 50 hours. The average amount of water for one irrigation of ordinary ground, that is not sun-baked, is 2.3 inches. With a little calculation you can determine how long it would take your flow of 37 miner's inches to give you 2.3 acre-inches."

"May we take that table, Andy?" asked Ted. "I'll copy it tonight. We never could remember it, and when it is time to irrigate, we shall want to know how long it will require."

"But what has all this to do with the reservoir?" Phil inquired, as the agent handed the table to his brother.

"Just this. On the reverse of the table you will find the miner's inch represented in gallons; 27,152 gallons are required for an acre-inch. When you get the west side cleared, you will have about 60 acres. Now 1 cubic foot of water equals 7.48 gallons. To get the required depth of 2.3 acre-inches for irrigating, you must have 8349 cubic feet of water, or practically 62,450 gallons per acre, or 3,747,000 gallons for the 60 acres. As your reservoir will have a depth of only 10 feet, you will have a million gallons, which will allow you to irrigate only about a

quarter of your land at one time. But, of course, it will be years before you will have the entire 60 acres under cultivation, considering all you have on the east side, and by that time you may be in a position to double the size of your reservoir. In irrigating, the more laterals you can use at one time the better, and the more water you have the more you can use. Now we'll lay out the course for the ditch with our grader."

Placing the shorter leg at the spot where the head gate to control the supply from the reservoir was to be, he told Ted to swing the longer leg until Phil should announce that the bubble was in the centre of the spirit level. When this had been done, the agent marked the second spot, then placed the shorter leg on it, and continued the operation until they had traversed all of the section to be irrigated, the contour, as the course is called, being nearly diagonal.

"Tomorrow we'll plow a furrow connecting those grade marks and then construct a ditch," said Andy, when the grading had been finished, "or rather begin it."

"Where do the laterals come in?" queried Phil.

"They run from your farm, or main, ditch. For grain, they are usually 75 feet apart; for

alfalfa, 90, and about 1300 feet long and they will run here at a grade of from one-half to three-fourths of an inch to the rod."

"My eye! but there is a lot to this irrigation business," exclaimed Ted. "My head actually aches with trying to remember all you have told us."

"It won't seem so complicated when you are doing it," smiled the agent.

"I hope not," Phil said. "But I don't see what holds the water on the fields after you get it there."

"Your borders. You must build banks about each field. That is the simplest method on land that is as easy to irrigate as yours. The banks are not high, just a furrow, so as not to interfere with passing from one field to another to mow and reap."

"Of course, this year, you will plant only two or three fields. In later years you can complete the system. The chief thing is to build your farm ditch long enough at first. Now let's go home and eat."

"Which makes me think, Joy insisted that we should go over there for supper. Hurry, or we shall be late," urged Phil.

The next morning found them at the site of



the dam with horses and plow. For two days they worked on the reservoir, and then the boys and Andy plowed three furrows on the grade line, then ran a "crowder," constructed of two planks in the shape of a V, with the wide end braced stoutly, up and down, forcing out as much dirt as possible, and for the next three days they all worked like beavers clearing the main and lateral ditches and shaping the borders on four fields.

To supply the water from the laterals to the fields, they constructed boxes, open at each end, 6 inches square and 3 feet long, which were laid beneath the banks of the laterals.

"We really ought to have plank heads at the laterals, but they are too expensive just now, so we can use canvas dams," said Andy. "It isn't worth while to spend the money on 'tappoons,' or metal dams, because in a few years you will be able to put in the regular plank gate, or even cement and steel gates, and every cent you save now is precious."

To regulate the water in the reservoir, they put in two gates, one to be kept open all the time to let water into the creek and the other to feed the main ditch.

A covered flume, made of 3-inch plank, laid

double, 30 feet long, 4 feet wide, and 4 feet high, was placed at the bottom of the dam. On both sides stout plank wings were built, the better to receive and discharge the water, the set in the reservoir resting against the dam, that in the ditch being carefully packed in order that no water might escape.

Fitted into the end along the farm ditch was a plank gate which could be raised and lowered at will.

Without accident the dam was finished and the gate opened six inches, that the creek might not be checked while the reservoir was filling.

“Now all you need to do is to plow and harrow the fields, then you can irrigate and sow,” said Andy.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A TERRIBLE EXPERIMENT

“**W**HAT shall we do today?” asked Phil, as they sat down to breakfast on the morning following the completion of their irrigation system.

“*I am going back to Chikau. Don’t dare stay away another day,*” returned Andy.

“I was afraid you would say that,” exclaimed Ted. “It has been mighty good of you to work with us as long as you have. But —”

“It certainly has,” interrupted the elder boy. “Some day, we may be able to do more than merely express our gratitude.”

“Oh, Andy knows that without our telling him,” declared Ted. “What I want to know is whether he thinks we should go over to Waterville and file our claims or wait awhile.”

“You must do that very soon,” responded the agent, “but if I were you, I would clear some of the other land and seed it down first.” Then, noting the disappointment that appeared in the boys’ faces, he added, in explanation: “Knowing

the land agent, I should not be surprised if you had some trouble in getting him to file your entry. Therefore, if you can say that you have not only built an irrigation system but have seeded down several plots of ground, you can the better prove your good faith."

At the suggestion of difficulty in filing their claim, the young homesteaders looked at each other in dismay.

"But why should the land agent refuse to accept our entry?" demanded Phil. "I think you should have told us before we laid out so much money and work."

"Now don't get excited," soothed Andy. "I just wanted to warn you that you might be the better prepared to meet any objections Simmons, the registrar, might raise."

"But why should he raise any?" persisted the elder boy, repeating his question.

"Well, for one reason, he has had an eye on E 1 himself. Only the law forbidding a land agent from taking up homesteads has prevented his doing so."

"Couldn't he get some one to take it up for him?" asked Ted.

"He has tried to, but it didn't work because Si exposed the fraud."



"You don't seem to like Simmons," mused Phil.

"Oh, I'm not the only one who doesn't. Si Hopkins is on his trail, and when he gets him there will be a new land agent at Waterville. That's one reason I want you to wait about filing your claim — there may be a new agent any day."

"How would we know if there were?" asked Ted.

"I'd tell you," said Andy, with a smile. "So, don't ask any more questions," he added, noting the facial expressions of his youthful companions. "Just clear some land, seed it down. When you have done that, if I haven't been over to see you, come to Chikau and I will advise you about going to Waterville."

Vainly did the young homesteaders seek to learn more concerning the present land agent and the reasons for a possible change in the office, but though their questions were ingenuous, Andy parried them, changing the trend of the conversation at every opportunity.

"I'll warrant if there is any change, it will be Andy Howe we find in the Land Office," suddenly declared Ted.

Though this suggestion caused both boys to

watch their companion closely, beyond casting a quick glance at the younger, Andy made no comment, merely announcing that he would see them within a few days, and after saying "good-bye" started back to his station.

"That was a shrewd guess of yours, Ted. Whatever put it into your head?" questioned his brother, as they went to select their tools for clearing the land.

"Oh, he seemed so bent on our waiting, I knew there must be some good reason. I hope he gets the appointment. Just the same, before we lay out any more money or work, *I* think we ought to find out about our entry being accepted."

"So do I, but speaking of money makes me think, where are you carrying ours?"

"In my pocket-book, in the bag about my waist."

"Seems to me, it would be safer to hide it in the hut. You might lose the bag, you know."

Though he protested that he would not, Phil insisted, and they finally put the pocket-book, from which they took out all over one hundred dollars, dividing the amount between them, in an old tin can, burying it in the ground under their bed of boughs.

With axes and grub-hoes, the young homesteaders set forth to clear the first field touched by their irrigation system.

At Ted's suggestion they began on the most densely brushed section, that they might do the hardest work while their ardour was most keen.

With a will they chopped and "grubbed," but the headway they made was scarcely noticeable.

"Here we've been working two hours, my hands are so blistered I can hardly hold my axe or hoe, and you wouldn't know we had been working at all," exclaimed Phil, in disgust stepping out to survey the result. "Looks as though some animal had been rooting for fun."

"Oh, come on. Wait till we've been working a week and then see what a change there will be," returned his brother.

"A week?" expostulated Phil. "At that rate it will be fall before we have anything planted. There must be some easier way than the one we're taking. I have it. We are a couple of 'boneheads.' We'll use dynamite. We can blow more brush out in five minutes than we can clear as we have been doing in a day. Come on back to camp. You know more about handling it than I do."

"But they only use dynamite to blow out rocks or tree stumps," protested Ted.

"Then it will surely blow out brush."

"Yes, and a lot of good earth, too."

"Well, let's try it anyhow. We'll only use a little at first. If it works all right, we can use more."

Though expressing his doubts as to the success of the experiment, the younger boy finally yielded, and, going to camp, they returned with three sticks of the explosive, caps, and fuses.

Making a hole among the roots of a particularly dense growth of scrub bushes, Ted planted a stick of dynamite, placed the cap, attached the fuse, and went into another clump of brush some two rods distant, to repeat the operation, for it was his purpose to explode the three charges at the same time by way of experiment to learn how much territory they would clear.

Before he had more than made the hole for the second stick, however, Phil shouted:

"How do I stop the fuse, Ted? I've lighted it."

"Stamp on it," Ted yelled, springing to his feet.

But before he could part the bushes to see what his brother had done, he heard a frantic



scream "Run!" followed by the crackling and snapping of branches as the elder boy fled from the scene.

Realizing the danger that the other two sticks of dynamite might be exploded by the force of the detonation, Ted hurriedly flung them with all his might in the direction opposite to that from which Phil's voice had come, then bent low, and dashed through the brush.

Not a yard had he gained, however, before there came a deafening roar, the ground rose under him and, in the midst of a cloud of earth, roots, and brush, he rose in the air.

Terrified, he shrieked. But the roar of the explosion drowned his cries, and he dropped to the ground, unconscious of the mass of dirt and brush that fell on him or about him.

Arrived at what he considered a safe distance, Phil had turned just in time to see the cloud raised by the dynamite shoot into the air. In vain he scanned the bushes near him for the sight of his brother coming toward him, and as the mass of debris dropped back to the ground and the echoes crashed from mountain to mountain, his face went white and his knees trembled under him.

Completely unnerved at the thought that his warning had been too late and that his brother

had fallen victim to his carelessness in firing the fuse before informing him of his intention, Phil fled, panic-stricken, from the spot, rushing madly to the camp, where he bridled his pony, leaped on its bare back, and raced toward the Jay farm.

At the sound of the rapid hoof-beats, Joy ran to the door.

“Oh, what is it? What’s happened?” she cried, as she beheld the look of terror on Phil’s face.

“W-where’s your father? - Quick!” gasped the boy.

Cool in emergencies, Joy stepped back into the house, picked up a tin horn, returned to the door, blew three shrill blasts, and then rushed to the boy, arriving just in time to catch him as he reeled from his pony in a faint.

To Jasper, working in his field behind the barn, the three blasts on the horn carried the signal that he was urgently needed at the cabin, and, dropping his tools, thinking only that Petersen had come to avenge the discovery of his theft of the horse, he ran to the back door, seized his rifle, cautiously advancing round the corner just as Joy dropped to the ground, took Phil’s head in her lap, and began to bathe it in some water she had fetched.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### TED MAKES A DISCOVERY

**P**AUSING in his tracks, the aged farmer stared from the lather-dripping, bare-backed pony to the seemingly lifeless boy whose head his daughter was bathing and caressing. Unable to solve the puzzle, Mr. Jay called:

“Who hurt him?”

Startled at the suddenness of the hail and wondering if her father had heard any of the words she had uttered as she worked over Phil, Joy turned a flushed face toward her father, only to scream:

“Put down that rifle, Pap! Don’t point it at us.”

Instantly her father obeyed, at the same time asking:

“What’s happened?”

“I don’t know.” And tersely Joy explained Phil’s arrival, his words, her blowing the horn, and the boy’s fainting.

“Must be something wrong with t’other one,” opined the farmer. “Wasn’t that a blast I heerd

just agone? Probably t'other one got hurted. You go saddle up, your fingers is limberer than mine, and I'll bring this young feller round."

Joy also had heard the explosion, and, as her father's words recalled it to her mind, she readily accepted his explanation of Phil's arrival and swoon.

"Don't be rough with him, Pap; he ain't our kind," she cautioned, as she tenderly placed Phil's head on the ground, sprang to her feet, and raced toward the barn.

In reply, the aged farmer grunted, watching his daughter till she entered the horse-stable, then darted into the cabin, opened a cupboard, seized a black bottle, and, returning to the boy, raised his head, then forced some of the brown liquid down his throat.

The strength of the stimulant burned Phil's throat, causing him to gag and sputter, and as Joy led forth the two horses, he opened his eyes.

"Here, take another dose. Can't have you going off again before we know what's wrong. 'Twould be a waste of time that must be precious seeing —"

"No, I'm all right," murmured the boy, sitting up. "It's Ted. I set off the dynamite too soon. I yelled to Ted, but he didn't c-come.



O-o-h!" and again Phil fell back in a swoon at the evident thought that he had killed his brother.

Horried at the words, father and daughter looked at one another and then at the prostrate boy.

"You go, Pap. I couldn't stand it to see — anything," she finished lamely.

"Give him another dose from this," he began, only to check himself and say, "No, you'd better let him sleep till I get back, if he will." And running to his horse, he climbed onto his back and galloped toward E 1.

Having closed his eyes when he found himself in the twisting, whirling mass of earth and brush, Ted lay perfectly still for several moments after he felt himself strike. As the roar in his ears subsided, however, he moved first one arm, then the other and finally his legs. Finding, to his surprised delight, that he could do so without pain, he shoved the tangle of brush away from him, sat up, rested a moment, then got to his feet, and gazed about him.

"'Jumping elk!' as Steve says, but that charge sure did clear some space!" Then his scattered wits returning, he bethought himself of his brother and yelled: "Phil, oh, Phil!"

When no answering hail came to him, he started to run only to stop, his face twisted in pain.

"Feels as though a million needles were sticking into me," he murmured to himself. And again he felt of his arms, legs, and body. "Nothing broken," he finally announced. "Must have been the shock of moving after landing so suddenly. Seems to me I've read something like it — a man who was blown up described."

Assured that his limbs were sound, the boy began to walk slowly, and as the pricking numbness vanished, he increased his pace, shouting all the while for his brother.

Alarmed at the failure to be answered, he suddenly paused.

"I couldn't have thrown those two sticks toward him!" he gasped, then dashed frantically forward.

Search, however, failed to show the sign of any other upheaval.

"Maybe he's gone to camp for stuff for me," Ted said to himself, and quickly hastened to the hut, where the absence of Pat suggested to him his brother's actions.

"Poor old Phil! He thinks he's done for me," he exclaimed, and quickly saddling Daisy, he

leaped onto her back and headed her toward the Jay farm, reasoning that his brother would go there for aid.

Eager to relieve the anguish he knew Phil would feel, Ted rode hard and was within a few feet of the clearing when a voice hailed him.

“Well, I swan! How’d *you* git here? Thought you was —” And then the aged farmer stopped abruptly, realizing his words were untimely.

But Ted seemed not to have heard them.

“Where’s Phil?” he demanded.

“Back at the cabin — in a dead faint. That is, he was when I left. But how’d you —”

“Never mind now,” returned the boy. And shaking out his pony, he raced ahead, Mr. Jay following as best he could.

Just as Ted appeared in sight, Phil opened his eyes, and as the sound of hoof-beats reached him, he looked questioningly at Joy.

“Why, it’s Ted *himself!*” cried the girl, in amazed delight.

At the words Phil sprang to his feet, but, as he assured himself of their truth, he sank down again.

With a cry of concern, Ted leaped from his

pony and knelt beside his brother. Frantically he and the girl worked over Phil, and at last he recovered consciousness.

“Ted!” “Phil!” And the brothers embraced lovingly.

When their composure had been restored, Ted related his experiences while the others marvelled at his escape.

“Better let me lend you a rail,” commented Mr. Jay. “You can drag that and it will pull up the brush. It’s slower, but it’s safer.”

“Thanks, we will,” smiled Ted. “But I guess we’ll let the clearing go till tomorrow. I think I’ll take a vacation the rest of the day.”

“Oh, goody! You can stay with us and I’ll teach you how to cook,” exclaimed Joy.

Eagerly the young homesteaders accepted the invitation, but they insisted upon being allowed to help, and donning some of the girl’s aprons, they were soon daubed with flour and dough.

“Lorsey, what a sight!” laughed the old settler, coming in a short time later. “I’m going to sow some alfalfa and thought maybe you’d like to see how ’twas done.”

“Now, Dad, you know Ted wants to rest. You shouldn’t have asked them,” Joy protested.



"I'm doctor and they can't go; besides, I am teaching them to cook so they won't be obliged to live on canned stuff."

"Wall, I kin put off planting the alfalfa until tomorrow. I've got enough to do in the garden," and Mr. Jay went out.

When milking-time came, the boys insisted on going to the corral in which the cows were herded to be milked.

"May I try?" asked Phil.

Readily the permission was granted, but after a few futile efforts to extract even a drop of milk, the cow looked round as though to see what manner of thing was pulling at her bag. Her inspection was evidently unsatisfactory, for she gave a kick that put Phil on his back and sent the pail spinning.

"Try this cow, I've got her started," directed Jasper, when the boy had picked himself and the pail up.

This time, thanks to the old settler's instruction, Phil did better.

"You'll get the knack with a little practice," he said. "She's the easiest milker in the herd, and when you go home you must take her. You'll find it mighty good to have fresh milk, and Joy'll show you how to prepare the cream

and make butter. No, you can't buy her. If I can't lend Winthrop Porter's boys a cow, it's a pity."

For the next two days the boys, still unnerved by their experience, having brought over the blacks from their camp to insure their safety, alternated between watching the old settler cultivate his land and Joy cook and do her churning.

"Reckon I'll have to go over tonight and see if Petersen will rent me his team to plow," announced Mr. Jay, at supper.

"With our blacks in the barn, eating their heads off?" exclaimed Ted.

"Know any more 'bout plowing than you did about milking?"

"We can learn, though; we ought to be able to help some."

"Sure you kin. And I'll be mighty glad. I don't like Petersen, but he's my nearest neighbour, except you, you know. He'll forget our little trouble when he thinks he's going to get some of my money."

"I'm afraid you'll be sorry we are not farther away," said Ted. "It will be easier to ride over than to cook a meal."

"You'll always find a welcome," returned

Joy, blushing. "Won't they, dad?" she added to cover her confusion at the fear the boys might think her forward.

"Them *and* their horses. Them blacks takes *my* eye." And they all laughed.

The next morning, with Ted driving and Phil holding the plow, the boys travelled back and forth across the field, more than holding their own with the older man.

"They done fine, Joy," declared her father, at dinner. "I wish they was my boys. You wouldn't know this quarter in two year. I'm a gettin' too old to work it properly, but they could. Seems though you young folks ought to be able to fix it somehow. E 1 and E 2 would make a splendid farm if they was joined."

"Why, Daddy Jay! The idea of your saying such a thing!" exclaimed the girl, her face turning to a bright crimson.

Turning to his brother, Ted was amazed to see that he too was blushing, and he coughed impishly as he surprised an interchange of glances between Phil and Joy.

"Guess we may be able to arrange it, Mr. Jay," he chuckled, whereat Phil and Joy became exceedingly interested in their food. "You old fox!" he cried, slapping his brother on his back,

as they went out to hitch up the horses. "Now I understand why your head ached so you had to go back to the house yesterday and the day before, only you've located your trouble in the wrong organ. Go in and win. She's a bully girl, and Mommy'll like —"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Phil. But though he obeyed, at intervals during the afternoon Ted gave vent to hearty chuckles.

"We'll go over to our quarter tomorrow," announced his brother, as they were preparing for bed.

"Why? *I* wouldn't turn away from such a g—"

A swiftly thrown pillow, striking him full in the face, smothered the rest of the sentence, and before he could continue, Phil was saying in his most impressive manner:

"If we can plow for Jasper, we can plow for ourselves. We mustn't let pleasure interfere with our serious purpose."

"Oh, rats! But if you are ready to go, I am. Too bad, though, Jasper didn't build his cabin on the line. We could build ours on our side and you wouldn't have to waste fifteen minutes riding over. Poor Pat! He'll wish he was back in Avon."



Phil's retort was a snore so studied that the younger boy laughed aloud.

The next morning, both the old settler and Joy urged the young homesteaders to stay the rest of the week, but they pleaded the necessity of getting their land planted as soon as possible.

Although they had bidden the girl good-bye before they went to the barn, Phil kept delaying to start, now that they were ready, with the ponies and cow tied behind and the iron rail in the wagon, his many covert glances toward the cabin indicating that he hoped for another glimpse of Joy.

"Guess you'll have us for dinner, after all, Mr. Jay," grinned Ted. "We don't seem to be travelling very fast."

A slap of the reins that started the blacks so suddenly they almost jerked the other animals off their feet was his brother's answer.

But before they had proceeded a rod, Joy ran from the cabin, staggering under the weight of a big basket.

"Here are some things I cooked for you," she said, as Ted sprang to the ground and relieved her of her load. And as the young homesteaders set out again, she called: "Come over to supper tomorrow night."

Several times Ted tried to start a conversation, but his brother maintained a haughty silence, and at last he gave it up and began to examine the basket Joy had given them, with the remark that if he couldn't talk he would eat.

No sooner had he raised the cloth than his eyes rested on an envelope.

" ' Mr. Phil Porter, ' " he read. " Funny that should be in *my* basket. Wonder who *he* is? " With a growl Phil snatched the envelope, while Ted grinned: " Better let me drive. Your poor head will ache so in a minute you won't be able to see the road. "

## CHAPTER XXX

### A SERIES OF UNPLEASANT SURPRISES

**B**Y tacit and mutual consent, when the young homesteaders arrived at their section, they made no mention of their terrible experience, and setting out some of Joy's food, ate ravenously.

"We ought to be able to clear and plow one field this afternoon," said Phil, when the last dish was wiped and put away.

Readily the younger boy agreed, and hitching the blacks to the plow, they were soon at the clearing, which looked as though it were pock-marked, the surface was so pitted with holes where the brush had been blown out.

"We'll save time by dragging with an iron rail, the way Mr. Jay told us, instead of trying to plow this scrub growth and grass under," declared Ted. Accordingly they took the whiffletrees and some chains from the plow, returned to camp, hitched on to the rail the aged settler had loaned them, drew it to the clearing, where they quickly made a horse fast to each end.

“Ready?” called Phil.

“Ready,” answered his brother.

“Then giddap.”

As the horses started, the edge of the rail bit into the ground, tearing up everything in its course, and by night the boys had cleared a couple of acres, for the growth was not heavy.

“Which shall it be — clear some more land or plant what we have cleared?” inquired Phil, when they were ready to work, the next morning. “Or I say, better still, as there is no wind, let’s burn the brush we cleared yesterday. Those piles don’t look very well, and if Petersen —”

“Oh, bother Petersen! As Joy said, he’s afraid of us. But we won’t burn any brush till Andy or Steve is here, it’s too dangerous.”

“Guess you are right. Which is it, clear or plant?”

“Plant. If I don’t sow my ‘Durum’ wheat right off, it won’t have any chance.”

“Hoped you had forgotten Durum for a while,” laughed his brother. “But as you haven’t, I suppose you must have your way. You can sow Durum and I’ll sow alfalfa.”

Laughing and chatting happily, the young homesteaders cut two bags in halves, tied short pieces of rope to the corners of the lower por-



tions, filled them with their respective seeds, and, slinging the ropes over their shoulders, set forth for their clearing.

Taking a handful of the seed, they scattered it broadcast, as they walked back and forth across the fields they had prepared.

"We must go back for more alfalfa," called Phil, before he had covered quite half of his clearing.

"More seed?" repeated his brother, in amazement. "Why, you had enough for that whole field. What on earth have you done with it?"

"Sowed it, of course."

"Dumped it, you mean," grinned Ted. "Look! I've got half of mine left. There won't be room for your alfalfa to grow, it will be so thick."

"And your Durum will be so thin you can drive a team between each stalk," retorted Phil.

"Well, my seed will last to cover all the land I want, which is more than you can say for your alfalfa. If you keep on as you've started, you won't have enough to plant one field, instead of four. And you know the storekeeper said we had a plenty for four."

"Perhaps *you* can make it last longer, I can't.

I don't believe that man in Bradley told the truth," snapped the elder boy.

"Now don't get peevish. Go back to camp, get some more seed, and when you return, I'll show you how to sow it."

In no pleasant mood Phil started off, only to return at full speed, beckoning frantically to his brother.

Surprised at such actions, and the more that Phil uttered no word of explanation, Ted ran to meet him.

"There are two men at the hut, and they are throwing our things out," gasped the elder boy, in a hoarse whisper, as they came within easy hailing distance.

"And our guns are inside," bemoaned Ted. "What did they say?"

"They did n't see me. I did n't give them the chance."

"Well, we have our rakes. We ought to be able to put up some fight with them. Come on."

But when the young homesteaders, after approaching the camp with all the stealth they knew, arrived at their hut, no sound came from within.

"Probably they have seen us," whispered Ted, in his brother's ear.

"Then we'll fool them," returned Phil. And taking off his cap, he placed it on the end of the rake, then pushed it forward until it was at the edge of the door where it would be plainly visible to any one inside.

Hearts seemingly in their mouths, the boys waited. But still there was no sign of the men Phil had seen.

At the end of several minutes Ted moved close to the hut, and carefully made an opening through which he could look.

"Not a soul in there," he exclaimed. "You must have been dreaming, Phil."

"Guess I know two men when I see them," he retorted. "Let's act as though we didn't know they were here. We'll talk out loud and pretend to be returning from the clearing. That ought to fetch them. Be ready, though."

This ruse also failed in its purpose, and, throwing discretion to the winds, Ted rushed boldly round the corner, then paused abruptly.

Hung beside the door was a sheet of paper on which was written in crude spelling:

You claim jumpers must go! Take your things and get! E 1 belongs to us. We filed on it 3 munths ago. We've put

your things outside, as the law directs. If we find you or them here when we return, there'll be more to it. Claim jumping ain't healthy in these regions!

The Rightful Owners of E 1.

Too astonished to speak for the moment, the boys stared at the warning.

"That's some trick!" Ted exclaimed at last.

"Bet it's Petersen's work," added his brother.

"It's somebody's, that's certain," agreed Ted.

"The thing for us to do is to go to Waterville and file our claim as fast as we can."

"Suppose these men have been there first," suggested the elder boy.

"Andy would have told us. Come on, we haven't any time to lose. You get the money while I saddle."

Ere Ted had finished, however, Phil joined him, his face white.

"The money's gone!" he shouted.

Dropping the cinch he was buckling, his brother dashed into the hut where the displaced boughs, the uncovered hole, and empty can proved the truth of the announcement.

"Every cent we had in the world," he sobbed.



“Not quite. We kept out some, you know. Twenty dollars, to be exact. That’s enough to pay the cost of filing. Let’s show these robbers we can do a thing or two. Good! They must have overlooked our pistols, though they’ve helped themselves to our rifles.”

Angered at the robbery and warning, the young homesteaders hurriedly buckled on their holsters, put some cartridges in their pockets, selected some food from the pile of their belongings in front of their door, and, finishing the saddling of their ponies, galloped away.

Having learned from Andy that the way to Waterville was the road leading past Petersen’s section, they lost no time in going down the brook and were soon racing along the highway.

With their mounts dripping lather, the young homesteaders finally drew rein in front of a building bearing a sign “Land Office.”

“We want to file on a claim,” said Phil, when they had entered.

“Got the money?” demanded a man on the front of whose desk was the word “Registrar.”

“Yes — that is, how much is it?” stammered the boy, amazed at such a question.

“Nineteen dollars.”

“We have it,” announced Ted, wondering if

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the relief he felt as he heard the amount was evident in his voice.

With a grunt the registrar took a form from his desk, got up, and advanced to the counter.

"Answer these questions," he snapped. "Names."

"Phil and Ted Porter," replied the elder boy.

"Where do you want to file?"

"On quarter section, E 1, Chikau township."

Mindful of Andy's statement that the registrar had long coveted the section upon which they had settled, the boys watched him closely as this answer was given. No outward sign of emotion did he evince. His head, however, was bent over the paper on which he was writing, and could the young homesteaders have seen the light that appeared in his eyes, they would have become even more upset than they were at the warning they had received.

"Raise your right hands and be sworn," droned the agent, and when the oath had been administered, he continued his interrogations, having put down their general description, leaving the particulars of their parentage and family.

"You have examined the land you desire for a homestead?"

"Yes, sir," replied Phil, who was acting as spokesman.

"Any coal or minerals?"

"No, sir."

"You are not filing this entry for the purpose of selling out to any person, persons, or corporations, or with their connivance?"

"No, sir."

"You will live on and cultivate the land to the best of your ability?"

"Yes, sir."

"By the way, you will enjoy the benefit of the law just signed by the President reducing the period of residence from five to three years and requiring a sojourn on the land of only five months in each year. You are not taking up this land as a speculation?"

"No, sir."

Several more minor questions the registrar asked, then said:

"Now just sign your names, there. Good! That completes the filing of your entry, except the payment of the fees. As you are taking up one hundred and sixty acres, you must pay the government ten dollars; if you had taken only eighty, or less, it would only have been five: I am entitled to a commission of a dollar and a

half for each forty acres and a fee of a dollar and a half for administering the oath and taking your affidavit, nineteen dollars in all.

"Ah, thank you," as Ted handed him the money. "Now, if you wish, at the end of fourteen months, you can commute your entry. That is, by paying a dollar and a quarter an acre and the necessary fees for being sworn, having four witnesses testify that you have lived on and cultivated the land for fourteen consecutive months, and the cost of notice by publication in a newspaper of your intended commutation, you can obtain your title to the land, which is called the patent. Of course, at the end of three years, without any charge per acre but with the fees for witnesses and the rest, you can obtain your patent just the same. The rest of the details you can learn from this pamphlet."

"Then you have accepted our entry?" asked Ted, after a silence of several seconds had brought no more questions.

"Not by any means." And there was a sinister smile about the registrar's mouth. "I have merely entered your claim."

As they heard the words, so evidently portent with meaning, the boys' hearts sank, for they had



taken hope as the interrogation had proceeded so smoothly.

"Doesn't this constitute the filing of our entry?" hazarded Phil, timidly.

"No, I told you."

"Why not? Has — has any one filed before us?" stammered Ted.

"What makes you ask that?"

"Why —" began the boy, when Phil broke in:

"We were told this would be the regular form."

"So it is. I wanted to get your answers under oath. The government is keen for punishing land frauds."

"Land frauds?" exclaimed both boys together.

"Exactly. You boys are neither of you of age. You have offered no paper from your parent approving your act, you have not received a special permit from the Secretary of the Interior, you have not offered evidence of having served in the army or navy, which would allow you to become homesteaders even if not of age. It is evident, therefore, that you are making a fraudulent entry. It will be my duty to have you arrested."

"Take back your money, Ted," commanded

his brother, boldly, though inwardly quaking at the threat of arrest.

“Don’t touch it!” snapped the registrar.

“Why not? The money is ours. You have refused our entry, so you have no right to it.”

“Isn’t my time worth anything?”

“Not out of our money. Put it in your pocket, Ted.”

“Leave it there. It is necessary as evidence of your filing.”

“Then give us a receipt,” retorted the elder boy.

Realizing that he could not bluff the young homesteaders, Simmons made out a receipt, whereupon Ted pushed the money toward him.

“I warn you not to leave this region until I have instructions from Washington about dealing with you,” admonished the registrar.

“You will find us on our homestead, if you want us,” returned Phil.

“If you go there, you do so at your own risk.”

“But our claim holds, pending your instructions from Washington?” demanded Phil.

“Yes.”

“Then come on, Ted. Oh, how soon may we expect to hear about it?”

“In two weeks, more or less.”

“ Which will give us time to consult Mr. Hopkins,” commented the elder boy, and summoning all his dignity, he led the way from the office, his brother at his heels, while the registrar laughed unpleasantly.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE FIRE LOOKOUT

**V**AULTING easily into their saddles, the boys lost no time in starting homeward, but so hard had they ridden to reach Waterville to file their claim that they were compelled to spare their ponies on the return.

Earnestly did they discuss the words of the registrar, speculating as to whether or not they really had committed a fraud and discussing the other surprising features of their interview with the official.

“Well, it’s some satisfaction to know our application protects us until word is received from Washington,” Ted finally declared. “It will block the game those claim-jumpers are trying to play.”

“I hope so. It doesn’t seem as though Simmons, knowing we were friends of Silas Hopkins, would dare to grant entry to whomsoever they are, now that we have put in our claim.”

Descending darkness caused the boys to give all their attention to guiding their ponies until



they realized that the animals were cleverer at keeping the road than they were themselves, and after they made this discovery, they devoted their senses to listening. For it was their first night in the saddle, alone, and they feared surprise both by men and wild beasts.

Without mishap, however, they finally reached their hut, where to their delight they found Andy. And eagerly they poured out their troubles to him.

“We’ll attend to this business in the morning. Go to bed now. You’ve had enough excitement for one day.”

Before dawn, however, the rain began to come down in torrents, percolating the thatched roof and compelling the young homesteaders and their guest to spread ponchos, blankets, and anything they could find to keep the water from their beds and from the food.

As later they looked out upon a rainy day, Ted’s heart sank.

“Everything’s either soaked or damp and nasty,” he complained. “The fire won’t burn enough to cook anything decently and we can’t work.”

“Never mind the work part of it,” returned Andy. “This rain will do a world of good.

Before harvest time you will probably be praying for a third as much of a downpour. We'll find enough to do, don't worry. What do you say to going fishing?"

"I say 'no,'" replied Phil. "If you are not going to do anything about our claim, I'm going over to see Mr. Jay."

At this announcement the others laughed heartily.

"I must think before I act," said Andy.

"Mr. Jay doesn't care any more about seeing you than you do about seeing him. If I were going to shirk all the chores, I'd at least tell the truth," grinned his brother. But Phil had fled from the water-soaked shakedown at the first words.

"You going too?" inquired Andy.

"Not much. If my letter paper isn't wet, I shall write home. If it is, I may ride over and give Jennie another lesson."

"You boys aren't very keen on fishing, evidently," commented Andy, as he overhauled his tackle.

"I never caught but two fish in my life. One was a 'pumpkin seed' and the other was a smelt. It took me four days to get them and I must have tramped thirty miles."

“You’ll find it’s different out here. If you followed this brook thirty miles — which you can’t because it’s only about ten from source to lake — you’d have more fish than you could carry. Better come.”

But Ted was not to be persuaded, and after they had finished the chores, Andy set out, leaving Ted writing.

In their letters to their mother the boys had refrained from mentioning the shooting of the bear and the incidents of the fateful dinner, fearing to alarm her, and Ted was busy explaining to her about the irrigation system when he heard hoof-beats.

Wondering who could be coming, he went to the door, and beheld a rubber-clad chap of about thirty, tall, lithe, and well set up, his face tanned by sun and wind, calmly leading his horse under the animal shelter.

“Pray make yourself perfectly at home,” called the boy, sarcastically.

“Thanks,” returned the other, smilingly ignoring the slur. “I am Chester, of the forest patrol. How long have you been here? I’ve noticed your smoke for several days, but this is the first rainy day I’ve had to leave my station to investigate.”

“ My name is Porter. Come in. My brother and I have had a rather rough time with strangers, which accounts for my uncivil greeting. I thought you patrolmen investigated every smudge as soon as you saw it.”

“ The patrolmen do, if it is on their route. I only said I belonged to the forest patrol, I’m a lookout.”

“ What’s that? ”

“ I have a station on the top of Bear Mountain from which I can cover about a thirty-mile radius. Whenever I see smoke, I report it to the patrolman in whose section it lies, or to the nearest settler who has a ’phone, if our man is out on his route.”

“ Hasn’t been any one here.”

“ Because I didn’t report it, it is off the regular route. I noticed the smoke showed and died down at certain periods, never gaining in volume, so I decided it was some new entryman. It being rainy, however, I rode down to make sure.”

The appearance and bearing of his visitor was so self-reliant, Ted felt that he was no enemy and did his best to be agreeable, telling him about his mother and sisters and the robbery, finally deluging him with questions concerning the life on the station.



In love with his work, as all the forest patrol are, Chester talked of it so interestingly that Ted began to envy him.

“It must be bully knowing you are guarding millions of dollars worth of lumber and the lives of so many people,” he declared enthusiastically. “Still, I should think you’d get lonesome off up there by yourself, but I suppose you read a lot.”

“I’m too busy watching for fires except when it rains, and then I usually have a trip to make, either like looking up a smudge or repairing a telephone. But a fellow can’t be lonesome among the trees and mountains, if he loves them.”

“How long are you on duty?”

“From snow-going to snow-coming. I sleep when I can. That is, when I can’t see any smoke, I take a nap for half an hour, watch again, then take another nap, and so on. But why not ride back with me? Never seen a lookout station, have you?”

“Never, and I’d like to immensely. But let’s eat before we go.”

“It sure will be good to taste grub I haven’t cooked myself,” declared Chester, as he ate with keen relish. “You’re some cook, if you made that pie.”

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"I didn't. A friend of ours gave it to us."

"Then you know Joy?"

"Yes. We were taken there after we had been drugged, and she kept us several days."

"Let's be on our way," said Chester, rising so suddenly that Ted looked at him in surprise. But it was not until long afterwards, when the lookout and the young homesteader were fast friends, that the boy learned the action was caused by the knowledge that the girl had bestowed some of her far-famed cooking upon strangers while she had always refused to give any to Chester, whom she had known all her life.

"What a glorious view!" cried Ted, turning to look back as, for the first time in his life, he passed beyond the timber-line of a mountain.

"It is superb. But wait until you get to my nest. It's wonderful from there."

When they reached the summit, however, the wind was blowing so that they lost no time in entering the octagonal cabin, one end of which was used for a stable.

Extending full across each side, about four feet from the floor, was a window, two feet high, enabling the lookout to sweep the country with his telescope.

“ I should think you could see better if the windows were taller,” commented Ted.

“ Some of the winds I get would break them in a minute. As it is, I often am obliged to put up the shutters and stand outside.”

In the centre of the cabin was a big table upon which lay a quantity of report blanks, paper, and a detail map of the country, within the radius of the lookout's station, showing ponds, lakes, rivers, towns, highways, railroad tracks, homesteads, and lumber camps, and giving the names of all settlers, with a code mark against those who had telephones. In other places were instruments for measuring the velocity of the wind, gauging the rainfall and the like.

Resting on a chair was a planed and polished piece of wood with a line running through the centre lengthwise, and another crosswise, to which an arrow, free to move in any direction, was attached.

“ That's a traverse board,” explained Chester. “ I'll show you how it works. First look under the map. See those marks on the table? They are the points of the compass. When you use the traverse board, you first ‘ orient ’ it, that is, place it so that its bearing is true with the points

of the compass, the needle pointing north. Now sit down. Take my telescope and look, say, south. Suppose you see smoke, but can't exactly locate it. You clamp the arrow to the traverse board, the point toward the smudge, so. Next, you put the map with my station directly over the centre of the traverse, that red dot which I've marked, so. Now stick a pin through my lookout and into the centre of the board, then twist the map until its north and south line covers the north and south line of the board, so. Take the range-finder, place its bevelled edge against the pin, raise the sight, no, keep the one with that upright hair away from your eye, and look at your smoke again. With the tables and marks you can quickly get the range and locate it on the map."

For several minutes Ted squinted along the sights, glanced at the range tables and then at the map.

"I should say it was about there," he said, putting his finger on a spot south of Bear Mountain.

"Too bad it isn't pleasant, you might find a real fire to practise on."

"But I have found one. My eye! but the smoke is getting thick. Yes, I'm sure it's where I pointed on the map."



At first the lookout had believed his visitor to be pretending that he had discovered a forest fire, but as he heard his last words, he pushed him from the chair and sighted along the range-finder.

“You’re right! You’ve located it, Porter. It’s on Carl Petersen’s quarter.”

And springing to his telephone, Chester called for connection with the man who was Jasper Jay’s nearest neighbour, with the exception of the young homesteaders.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL

“**N**OBODY answers, eh? That’s funny. Give me Burke, then, please, central. Oh, I say. You don’t know where Larry is, do you? Petersen is on his route and — What? Yes, please. If you locate him, tell him to go to Petersen’s, find out about the fire, and call me up. Yes, I’ll be at the station. Oh, hello, Burke. This is Chester. I wish you would ride over to Petersen’s and take a look at that fire. Yes, the sooner you can let me know the better.”

“Do you often have a fire break out on a rainy day?” asked Ted, as the lookout swung around in his chair, after setting down his telephone instrument.

“That’s just the point exactly,” said Chester, evidencing that the young homesteader’s remark had fitted in with his own train of thought. “No ordinary fire could break out after the soaking everything has had for the last twelve hours,

though the sun will be shining again in a couple more."

"Maybe it's his house," suggested Ted.

"That wouldn't make so much smoke. It's hardly big enough to turn round in."

"Then why not ride down and find out? Is it far?"

"Not very, but I want to wait here until I get a report."

The expression on the boy's face, as he heard this statement, showed that he considered the lookout to be shirking his duties and, noting it, Chester said:

"I know what's in your mind. You think I'm too lazy to ride a few miles in the rain. It isn't that"; then he paused a moment, and looked searchingly at his visitor before continuing: "You seem like the right sort. If you weren't, Andy Howe, Steve Anderson, and Si Hopkins wouldn't lift a finger for you, let alone doing all they could to help you. The point is this. We are suspicious of Petersen. He's had trouble with all his neighbours. He set up a saw-mill last winter, and they caught him cutting trees beyond his lines. To cover this, he cut down the corner trees. The matter is in court now."

“ And he tried to steal one of our horses. But how would a fire help him? ”

“ Remove the evidence that he had cut down the government trees and let him swear that he thought he was cutting on his own land.”

“ I see. Yet what could he set on fire that would burn after this rain? ”

The outlook's answer was forestalled by the buzzing of his telephone.

“ Good for you, Larry! ” he exclaimed, after listening a few minutes. “ I tried to raise you through central. So it's in the sawdust pile, eh? Reckon we've got Petersen this time. What, must have been burning several days? It doesn't make any difference if it has, I think he set it just the same. Sure he didn't see you there? Good. Yes, I sent Burke over. Meet him and impress him and his men. I'll send you some others. Sure. Tunnelling is the only thing, I'm afraid. But be careful. That pile must be forty feet high and a hundred and fifty long. It wouldn't take more than a minute to bury a hundred men. Yes, I'll stay here. Let me know how things are going. Yes, from Burke's. Good luck and watch out when you are tunnelling.”

For many minutes after he had talked with the patrolman, the lookout was busy calling up



various settlers and ordering them to go to the fire, finally notifying the district chief in whose division Petersen's homestead was located.

"Do you suppose those men will go?" asked Ted, as Chester set down his telephone, picked up his telescope, and trained it on the smoke.

"You bet they will and anybody else I order. Cross my heart! but that's going to be some fire. Look, there is twice as much smoke as there was before." And he handed the telescope to the boy, who was amazed to see several columns of smoke where there had been only one or two when he had discovered it.

"But how can you know they'll go?" queried Ted, returning to the subject of collecting the band of fire-fighters.

"Because they can be arrested if they refuse. I'm a fire warden, all lookouts are, and I can order anybody and everybody I see fit to fight a fire, even you. It's hard and dangerous work at a big fire and most men don't like it. So in order to insure a warden's securing the necessary assistance, it has been made law that men must go when ordered, on penalty of imprisonment. It is the same in all States where there is a fire patrol. Of course, our regular men are sent when they can be spared."

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"I'm afraid I shouldn't be much good. I wouldn't know what to do."

"You'd be told quick enough." And the lookout began an explanation of the various methods of stopping and fighting forest fires, from the simple method of making furrow-checks with plows, hoes, and shovels for the blaze that runs over the ground to back-firing, or starting a fire in opposition when the wind is right to drive it toward the forest fire — a method only used in desperate emergencies when the fire is beyond control and leaping from tree to tree.

Finding a willing and eager listener in the young homesteader, Chester was pointing out on the map and describing the biggest fires that had occurred in his division, when his buzzer again rang.

"Ho? Oh, you, Mr. Jackson? Yes, sir, right away." And hastily picking up a notebook and pencils, he hurried toward his pony, saying: "Sorry, but the district chief has sent for me. Wants to question Petersen and I'm the only man he has handy who writes shorthand. Casey's on his way to serve here."

With a rapidity that surprised Ted, the lookout had saddled and bridled, then turned to help him. And at a pace that seemed foolhardy, the

warden was soon descending the trail, leaving the boy far behind.

"Better go back to your claim," he shouted, as he reached the level. "I've got to ride so hard you'd get lost trying to follow. See you again sometime."

And before the young homesteader could protest, for he was keen to watch, and perhaps help, in the fire-fighting, Chester was out of sight.

"Good thing I paid especial attention to the trail when we rode over," said Ted to himself, as he turned Daisy toward E 1. "Some time, though, old girl, they'll find you and I can cover ground even if I am a tenderfoot."

As the lookout had predicted, the sun burst through the clouds before the boy reached the shakedown, and its torrid rays were quickly drying the trees.

Coming within sight of the thatched hut, Ted suddenly drew rein, as he beheld a pony tied near the door.

"Wonder who it is this time." And the boy's hand dropped to his holster, which Andy had cautioned the young homesteaders never to be without, in view of the warning they had received.

But he withdrew his hand as quickly as he had lowered it when the person who had ridden the

strange pony, having heard his approach, appeared in the doorway.

“Jennie, of all people!” gasped Ted, as he saw the crippled little figure. “What on earth brought *you* over here?” Then noting the shadow of pain his abrupt words had sent to the girl’s face, he added hastily: “I surely am mighty glad to see you. I was thinking of riding over this afternoon.”

Her smile restored by these assurances, Jennie said:

“I came with a telegram for you.”

“A telegram? How did you get it when Andy is here?”

“It was sent to Hutchins when Chikau couldn’t be raised. The agent there telephoned it over. I think it is important, so I brought it. Steve is away and I took his horse.”

“Good girl. Where’s the message?”

“Pap was out when it came. I couldn’t write it, so I remembered it. It said: ‘Phil and Ted Porter, Chikau. Your mother and sisters will arrive Friday!’”

“Why, today is Friday!”

“I know it. That’s why I thought you ought to get it.”

“I should say ‘yes.’ But where’s it been all



this time? You can't travel from Weston to Chikau in a few hours. Who sent it?"

"How do I know? I never was in Weston."

"I mean who signed it. There's always a signature to a telegram and a date line, as well."

"Oh dear! I didn't pay 'tention to them. I never took a telegram before. I thought it was just what it said that counted." And Jennie's face puckered ready to cry. For she had been proud at being the bearer of the message and had confidently expected praise instead of criticism.

"Never mind, so long as I know Momsy's coming, that is the main thing. But we haven't much time to get to Chikau. How's the road?" asked Ted, as he hurried from the shakedown and began to harness the blacks.

"Toler'ble."

"That's better than it was when we rode over here." And without more words they filled the wagon with blankets and pillows to ease the jouncing for the little mother, then tied Daisy and Jennie's pony to the tail.

"Almost forgot to leave a note for Phil and Andy," exclaimed the boy as he was climbing to the seat. Stepping down, he ran into the hut, hastily scrawled, "Gone to meet Momsy and the

girls," and placed it on a branch beside the door where it would not fail to attract attention.

"You're sure it said Friday?" asked Ted, as they drove along.

"'Deed I am. I asked three or four times, 'special.'"

"Funny it didn't get here sooner. It must have been Dr. Blair who sent it. At least, it sounds like —"

"Yes, that's the name," Jennie eagerly interrupted. "I wasn't sure, so I didn't want to say."

"And was it dated Weston or Boston, Mass.?"

"I don't remember."

The time passed quickly for the girl as she listened to her companion's account of his doings, but it seemed to Ted that they never would come in sight of Peleg's store.

"Gracious! it's four o'clock," he cried in dismay, looking at his watch. "As they didn't come this morning, they must be coming on 64 and she's due at five. How near are we?"

"Inside of five miles."

"Then sit tight. I've got to trot if we're going to cover five miles over this road in time to meet the train."

But the going was so rough that after almost

being thrown under the horses' hoofs several times, the boy slowed down.

"Momsy'll be disappointed if no one meets her," he murmured.

"Let's stand up back of the seat. Then you can trot," suggested Jennie. And doing so, they were soon bumping along at a smart pace.

"There's the store," gasped Ted, catching a glimpse of the welcome landmark, and he urged the blacks faster.

"64's just whistled," announced Peleg, as the boy drew up in front of the steps.

"Quick, take the reins, Jennie, and wait here. I can run to the station faster than I can drive." And jumping to the ground, the young homesteader sped down the track, arriving in just time enough to recover his breath as 64 stopped.

Warm were the greetings between the little mother and Ted and his sisters, and they were prolonged until Sallie suddenly asked:

"Where's Phil?"

"He's sparking. It was only luck I got your telegram in time to get here. It didn't come until this morning, and if a little friend of mine hadn't ridden twenty-five miles, I should not have received it."

"Must we travel twenty-five miles *more* to-

night?" groaned Margie. Then, seeing nothing but trees all about, she asked: "How do we go, fly?"

"You will stay at Chikau tonight and we'll drive home — just think, Momsy, *home* — tomorrow."

"But where is Chikau? I've been looking for it ever since I got off the train," declared the younger girl.

Before her brother could reply, however, Sallie exclaimed:

"Where's the baggage man to give us our trunks? Here are our checks."

"There, there, daughter. Give Ted time. We are in the wilderness, you know," interposed Mrs. Porter. But she did not prevent the avalanche of caustic criticisms that the boy poured upon his sisters for their unreasonableness and airs.

"Here comes somebody or something," cried Margie, pointing to the woods, and turning, they beheld the blacks driven by Jennie and Peleg.

"How do you like those horses? They are yours, Momsy," said the young homesteader, proudly.

Running out, Ted brought up the team, introduced the storekeeper and his daughter, then



helped his mother and sisters into the wagon, and merrily they chatted and laughed as they bumped along to the settlement.

Taking Mrs. Porter to her room, Jennie bustled about getting supper, assisted ably by Ted, while his sisters looked on delightedly as the boy made a spider cake.

"Oh, our trunks! They haven't been brought from the station yet," cried Sallie in alarm, as they were eating.

"Nobody will run off with them but a bear, and I shot the only one that was around here," chuckled Ted.

"*You?*" gasped his sisters. Whereat the boy hurried away and returned with the pelt, which he had brought in the wagon, as evidence of his marksmanship.

As they were seated about the store, talking, after supper, Steve came in, and later, Phil.

"Why, Momsy looks better already just for the sight of you farmers," said Margie.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### FIGHTING FOR THEIR HOME

**E**ARLY the next morning the boys, who had slept in Steve's cabin while their mother and sisters had used Jennie's room, were awakened by Andy, who was talking earnestly to Steve.

Starting to rise up on his elbow, Phil was pulled back by his brother, who motioned him to lie quiet and listen.

"I don't know whether we shall be able to stop it or not," the agent was saying. "It's a pity that Mrs. Porter and the girls couldn't have waited a bit longer. It will be an awful disappointment to them to get out here and then find their claim wiped out. I came back by way of the camp and sent your jacks over to E 1. I told Thomas to put them at work hauling the brush we've cleared off back onto the fields at the west. I opened the head gate as I came along. From the way things were going, I don't believe it will be possible to save Jay's. He and

Joy were packing up what stuff they could and loading it into their old schooner. They're going to bring them and their livestock over to the boys' shakedown. If we can't stop the fire at E 1, it will sweep the country right through to your camp. Be quiet about going out so as not to waken Ted and Phil. I'm afraid they would be so anxious to help that they would get into trouble. They don't know anything about fighting fire."

"You may think you can keep us from fighting for our home, but you can't!" declared Ted, leaping from the bed.

"And we'll show you that we aren't such duffers, after all," added his brother. "We're going with you — and you can't keep us away."

"But how about your mother and sisters?" queried Steve. "One of you ought to stay here with them and quiet them. If I had my way, you'd both stay. Two men more or less will not make any difference in checking the fire."

At the thought of the little woman and the girls, the young homesteaders looked at one another in dismay.

"I'm older and I shall go. You must stay. As head of the family, I order you to," exclaimed Phil.

"Like fun I —" began the younger boy, when a timid knock at the door interrupted him.

"Please, Mr. Jackson has sent over here for coffee and food for the fire-fighters and the ladies are taking on something awful," gasped Jennie from the door which Steve had opened.

"The whole kettle is in the fire now," growled Andy. "Come on, we'll go over to the store and question Jackson's man."

"Oh, Phil, this man says our homestead is going to be burned up," wailed Margie, as she caught sight of her brother in the dim light of the store.

"Nonsense. You should know better than that, Ivers," snapped Andy, who, noting at a hurried glance that Mrs. Porter seemed on the verge of collapse, was endeavouring to ease her mind. "If there is one place where we can check the blaze, it is at E 1."

"Like —" began the messenger, only to be cut short by Steve.

"What did you come over for?"

"Coffee and all the food I can carry."

"Then get it and get out. Tell Jackson that my jacks are on E 1. Because of the cleared ground there, that is the place to check the fire. Tell him we are going over there our-



selves directly, and ask him to send his force, or all that he can spare, over to us," instructed Andy.

In short order Ivers was loaded down with cans of all kinds of food, and quickly he galloped away.

"I am sorry you have learned about the fire, Mrs. Porter," said the agent, "but it may be just as well, after all. Steve and I are going over. You will be perfectly safe here, and you can rest assured that we shall do everything in our power to save your homestead."

"And we're going too," announced Ted.

"Then we shall all go," declared the little mother. "I should never have a second's peace if I should stay here while you are all over there. No, it won't do me nearly as much harm to go over as it would to force me to remain here. Margie, run and get our things. We will be ready in a few minutes, Mr. Howe."

At this decision the agent looked at the foreman.

"Reckon it may be the best thing, after all," murmured Steve. "Anyhow, it will put more heart into the men to know that the family is on the quarter." And accordingly the men hastened away to harness the blacks, while the others

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bustled about making ready, and at last, with Ted driving, his mother and sisters seated on piles of blankets and cushions, they set out, Phil, Andy, and Steve having ridden on ahead.

Pausing at the ridge overlooking their homestead, the boy cried:

“There’s E 1, Mommy, down where you see all those fields.”

In silence the woman and her daughters looked upon the haven, then impulsively threw their arms about one another’s necks. And alternately crying and laughing, they arrived at the shakedown, where they found Joy already busy making a washboiler full of coffee.

The pall of smoke could be seen in the west. Under its stress the introductions were short, and quickly the girls were assisting Joy in preparing the drink and food for which men were beginning to come in, some waiting to eat, others carrying back baskets and pails full to those on the fire lines.

Assured of their mother’s safety, the boys hastened away to the fire, but they went no farther than the edge of their quarter, where men were busily felling trees so that the branches and tops fell toward the blaze.

Seeing Andy, Steve, and another man talking,

Phil and Ted rode to them just in time to hear the stranger say:

“It was a splendid idea making our stand on this clearing. There’s no doubt about our being able to check the fire here.” And, after being introduced to the district chief, for the stranger was none other than Mr. Jackson, the boys hurried back to carry the glad news to their mother and sisters that their home was safe, after all.

Not without herculean effort was it, however, that the fire was checked on E 1. As the flames fell upon the tree-tops lying toward them, they leaped into the air, sending forth heat and smoke before which the fire-fighters were compelled to give way. And as they yielded ground, little tongues of flame shot out into the grass, and soon the entire section seemed to be ablaze.

“Better move the women. The shakedown is doomed,” announced Mr. Jackson to Andy. “We can hold the fire on E 1, all right, but we can’t save the hut.”

As cheerfully as he could, the agent delivered his instructions. And to his relief, the women did not go into hysterics.

“Where do you wish us to go?” asked Mrs. Porter.

“To the dam. We’ll load everything into the wagon, there is plenty of time, and haul it up there.”

“It’s too bad the shakedown must go, it’s so cute,” sighed Margie. “And I did so want to sleep on a bed of boughs.”

“You’ll have chance enough, and without a roof over your head, either,” returned Ted. “We’ll be obliged to sleep outdoors until we build a cabin.”

“Which won’t be very long,” smiled Andy, as he noted the look of horror which settled on Sallie’s face. “I’ll speak to some of the boys and we’ll have a regular, old-fashioned house-raising.”

Before either of the girls could ask what such an occasion was like, Andy was summoned, and he waited only long enough to give the boys directions for action in case it should be necessary to resort to heroic measures at the dam, then hurried away.

“I think he’s just grand!” exclaimed Sallie, following the lithe form of the agent as he walked away.

“Better chain your children up, Mommy,” chuckled Ted. “If you don’t you’ll lose them out here. I’m just holding Phil by the hair of



his head.” And without giving his brother time to reply, he started the horses, while the rest of the little family walked.

As they stopped at the dam and looked down upon the burning section, the flames leaped upon the hut.

“Oh, dear, there goes our home. I feel just as though we were losing everything, section and all,” wailed Margie, bursting into tears.

The words, recalling their anything but satisfactory visit at the Land Office, caused the boys to glance sharply at one another, and neither could find the heart to speak.

After the first terrific flash as the grass and brush caught fire, the blaze soon died down, and the fire-fighters were soon able to check the ground-running tongues of flame, even before they reached the area which Andy had flooded.

At last, word was brought to the anxious little group that all danger was over, and in ecstasy of thanksgiving they dropped on their knees and prayed.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE GIRLS MAKE FRIENDS

**A**SSURED that all danger was over, Phil announced that he was going to look over the burned area to find out how extensive it was.

“I’m going too,” declared his brother. “I can tell better than you because I have a better eye for distances.”

“Oh, don’t leave us alone among all these strange men,” pleaded Sallie.

As she heard the words, Joy flushed.

“The men in Washington are just as good — from things I have read they must be better than those in the East, Miss Porter,” she exclaimed defiantly.

Elevating her eyebrows, Sallie was about to retort scathingly, when Ted, who knew his sister’s mannerisms, interposed:

“Joy is *right*, Sis. The men out here may not be quite so — er — polished as those back East, but their hearts are in the right place and you

are perfectly safe with them — and you want to lay aside all your fool notions, or you won't be popular."

"Listen to the —" began Sallie, only to be interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Jackson and Chester.

"I wonder if you can make some more coffee?" inquired the former. "Some of the fire-fighters are pretty badly used up. If you can, I will send them up here."

"Surely we can," answered Joy, while the two Eastern girls looked at each other helplessly. And immediately she began the preparations.

"Can't you two help?" demanded Phil. "Now's the time for you to prove that you are useful as well as ornamental."

If looks could have killed, the boy would have been struck down by the glances his sisters bestowed on him, but they set about assisting Joy with a will.

"Thank you, thank you very much," said Mr. Jackson, with a smile. "I'll send the men to you in about fifteen minutes."

The pall of smoke still hung over the lowland, however, or those preparing the coffee and such other food as they had would have seen them already stumbling exhaustedly toward the dam.

Of a sudden there sounded a deafening roar, followed by piercing shrieks.

In horror, those about the wagon gazed below.

“That’s dynamite!” exclaimed Mr. Jackson. “It can’t be that you boys were thoughtless enough to leave any at your —”

“If they had, it would have exploded when the hut burned, not now, so long afterward,” interrupted Chester. While Phil said:

“No, sir. I put it all in a bag, in the wagon, on some bedding.”

“Then where could it have come from?” demanded the superintendent.

“It must have been those two sticks I threw away the day Phil and I were blowing out brush,” announced Ted.

About to upbraid the young homesteaders for their carelessness in leaving the explosive unreclaimed, Mr. Jackson held his words, and with a command to Chester, ran down the hill, followed by the boys.

At this fresh catastrophe Joy’s heart sank, for she expected the girls and their mother would collapse. But she was agreeably surprised. Though their faces were very white and their hands trembled, the three Eastern women turned



with one accord to the pile of bedding and began to tear the sheets into strips for bandages.

"Thank goodness, you won't need those," declared Andy, suddenly appearing.

"But the cries?" exclaimed Sallie.

"Just surprise and warnings. The men's nerves have been badly strained and the explosion startled them."

"We certainly have a great deal for which to be thankful," said Mrs. Porter. "I should never get over it if any of these brave men had been injured through my boys' carelessness."

As he heard the words, the agent looked at the little woman in amazement. "I don't understand," he murmured. In reply, Mrs. Porter repeated Ted's statement.

"Well, it is a relief to know there were only two sticks of it lying about," returned Andy. "I was afraid some one might have planted the explosive throughout the section."

The arrival of others of the fire-fighters put an end to further conversation, for Andy assisted the women in serving the coffee and food.

As the men came forward, they greeted Joy heartily, while they looked wonderingly at the two stylish Easterners.

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"These are Phil's and Ted's sisters and their mother," said the agent by way of introduction, whereat the men bowed stiffly and became silent.

Determined to break the awkwardness of the situation, Margie exclaimed:

"If you please, we prefer to be known for ourselves and not as Phil's and Ted's sisters. I am Margie and this is Sallie." And she made a mock courtesy.

"Brava! That's the way to get on out here," laughed Mr. Jackson, who had come up just in time to hear Margie's introduction. Then turning to Mrs. Porter, he added: "We are all like one big family out here. Somehow the woods make us forget ceremony."

Thus a feeling of fellowship having been established, the men ate and rested, recounting the narrow escapes they had had as the fire drove them back.

"There's always a silver lining to the blackest cloud," declared Chester. "You boys have been spared a lot of hard work it would have taken to clear your land."

"That's true enough," assented Ted. "What worries me, though, is whether the fire has dried all the natural moisture there was in the

ground. If it has, our crops won't amount to much."

"The growth was so light, I doubt if the soil has been damaged," returned Mr. Jackson. "A few tests with a soil box, however, will tell you positively."

"Then let's make them," suggested Phil. "Andy's sectional bore is in the wagon."

The boy's eagerness evoked laughter from the other men.

"You must wait a couple of days until the ground cools," announced Chester.

"Just at present the thing to do is to build a shelter for the ladies," said Mr. Jackson.

"Oh, no. We are going to sleep outdoors, Ted said so," declared Margie. "I think it will be lots of fun if too many bugs and things don't crawl over us."

"Or unless it rains," grinned one of the firefighters.

"You can sleep in the open if you care to," said Andy, "but when we have so many men here it would be a pity not to take advantage of the fact. We can put up a house of boughs in no time. Come on, fellows. Let's show these Eastern ladies how quickly we can build one."

Glad of the opportunity to atone for their

awkwardness with knives and forks, the men seized axes, shovels, and hoes and fell to work, erecting a camp in a surprisingly short time.

“There, you can live in that all summer,” declared Steve, as the task was finished.

“I thought we were to have a log cabin,” Margie exclaimed.

“So we are, when we have time to build it,” returned Phil. “At present, the most important thing is to repair our irrigation plant and then sow our seed.”

“I say, why not have an old-fashioned house-raising?” exclaimed Chester.

The suggestion met with hearty response, and after much talk and laughter it was agreed that the boys should notify their neighbours when they had finished their planting and that they would give them two days, one for preparing the logs and the other for the “raising.”

“But we never can repay you,” said Mrs. Porter.

“Just feed us, that is all the pay we will ask,” replied Chester.

“Food *and* a dance,” added one of the others, “that is, if the young ladies dance.” And he looked inquiringly at Sallie and Margie.



“ Oh, I think we might be persuaded to try,” laughed the younger girl. And when they had discussed the plans again, the men returned to their several homes, leaving the family alone save for the Jays and Andy.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### AT WORK IN EARNEST

WHILE the girls were washing the dishes, Phil told his mother about Mr. Jay's acquaintance with their father, and the little woman then and there took Joy to her heart.

"We're going to look over the section with Andy," finally announced Phil. "When we get back, we'll help fix up the camp." But when they returned from their inspection, they found that the girls had anticipated them and that the bough house was surprisingly homelike.

"My, but it does seem good to come back and find you here, Momsy," said Ted, putting his arm about her affectionately.

"Tell us how you happened to come out so soon," demanded the elder boy. "Honestly, when I found Ted's note saying he had gone to meet you, I thought he was playing a trick on me."

Before Mrs. Porter could answer, however, Margie exclaimed:

“ We made Momsy come. There was no living with her. Your train wasn’t out of sight from the station before she began to worry about you, and when she got so she couldn’t say ten words without wondering how you were getting along, Sallie and I just put our feet down and said we would come out here, so we could have a few minutes’ peace.”

“ Well, we’re sure glad to see you, even if we couldn’t give you the reception we hoped,” said Phil. “ Still, I think it would be best for you to board at Peleg’s for awhile.”

“ Pay board when we can live on our own homestead and in our own house? Do you think we are millionaires? ” demanded Sallie.

“ You’ve made a nice mess of things,” snorted Ted, looking at his brother angrily. “ Why couldn’t you keep quiet for awhile? Don’t you know Momsy’s had enough with this fire? ”

At the words, so evidently full of meaning, the little woman and the girls looked at one another and then at the boys, in wonder.

“ Seems to me it’s *you*, not *I*, who has made the mess,” retorted Phil.

“ Stop talking in riddles and tell us why you want us to board,” exclaimed Margie, impatiently.

As the boys had taunted one another, Joy and her father had listened in amazement, and they were as keen to hear the explanation as the others. When Phil had finished the story of the warning and of the trip to the Land Office at Waterville, Jasper exclaimed:

“Don’t you worry one mite, Mis’ Porter. First thing tomorrow, I’ll drop round to see some of the neighbours. *There won’t be any more warnings!* As for Bill Simmons, the land agent, when I tell him a thing or two I know, I ’low *he* won’t be so high and mighty.”

But it was Andy who did the most toward reassuring Mrs. Porter.

“I am going to tell you all a secret,” he said. “Simmons is going to be removed as land agent. Several complaints have been filed against him in Washington, and they are so serious that the Secretary of the Interior has decided to appoint another agent. From this man you may be certain you will receive justice. In the meantime, my advice is to go ahead, just as though your entry had been accepted.”

“I hope you are right, I am sure, Mr. Howe.”

“Andy, please, Mrs. Porter.”

“Well, Andy, then. But you know we haven’t much money, and if we should spend what I have



and what the boys have and then lose the homestead, we should — be ruined.”

“I should not advise you to go ahead if I thought there was any doubt, Mrs. Porter.” Then, seeing that the little woman was not yet entirely reassured, he added: “I will tell you, and this is even more of a secret than the other, that I expect to be appointed land agent in Simmons’ place.”

“Good! Fine! *Now* we’ll be all right!” exclaimed the boys, while Jasper and his daughter also expressed their delight at the prospect.

“I suppose Si Hopkins is back of you?” said the aged farmer.

“He is,” Andy replied.

“Speaking of money,” said Joy, after they had discussed the reasons for the land agent’s removal, “did you think to dig up the tin can when you cleared out the camp, Phil?”

“Nobody was talking of money,” returned the boy, frowning. But his attempt to put off the question was futile, for Margie and Sallie badgered him about burying his money, and then, as he showed no signs of going to dig up the can, his younger sister declared she would.

“It’s no use,” he growled. “The men who wrote the warning dug it up.”

"You mean you've been robbed?" gasped Sallie.

"Yes."

"Of how much?"

"A hundred dollars."

"How much have you left?"

"About a dollar, isn't it, Ted?"

"Eighty-five cents, to be exact."

"What on earth were you going to do?" demanded Margie.

"Oh, we had food enough and all our seed and tools, so, after planting, we were going to hire out to our neighbours, if we could," returned Phil.

"Steve offered us each a job at fifty dollars a month, when we first came," said Ted. "We figured we could work a month while our stuff was growing. That would give us back the hundred we lost."

"The idee, and me with the two hundred Winthrop Porter loaned me in my pocket," exclaimed Jasper. "Here, take it." And drawing out his well-worn wallet, Mr. Jay again took out the two bills.

"We settled that once, Mr. Jay," said Phil. And he explained his decision to his mother.

"My boy decided rightly, Mr. Jay," declared

Mrs. Porter. "Besides, I have about three hundred dollars, so that we shall do very well."

And though both Joy and her father urged them to take the money, the Porters refused.

"Why, you've lost everything except what you brought in your schooner," exclaimed Phil. "You need it even more than we do."

"That's true, Jasper," declared Andy. "Furthermore, Si won't let these boys fail for lack of a little money, to say nothing of myself."

"Why not let Andy keep our money for us, Momsy?" suggested Sallie. "Those horrid men might take it from us. But it would be safe with him."

"You seem to have a mighty fine opinion of Andy," chuckled Ted, in a tone that sent flushes to his sister's cheeks. But they all recognized the wisdom of the suggestion, and Mrs. Porter handed over the money, for which the station agent insisted upon giving a receipt.

"I hated to tell you about it, Momsy, but I'm glad it's settled," declared Phil. "It didn't seem right to have any secret from you, yet Ted and I did not wish to cause you any worry."

"Now suppose we all turn in," said Andy. "We've had a hard day and there's a lot of work to be done tomorrow."

This suggestion was readily accepted, and while the womenfolk made themselves comfortable in the bough house, the men, after making certain the horses and cows were securely tied, rolled up in their blankets about the campfire.

Up bright and early the next day, it was decided that Jasper and Joy should stay and help the homesteaders do their planting, after which Ted and Phil would assist them.

Going down to the lowland, they discovered the ground had cooled to such an extent that Andy and Jasper decided it would do no harm to plow, and accordingly they went at it, while the agent returned to Chikau.

On the aged farmer's advice, they worked the land into fields thirteen hundred feet long and about seventy wide, for in that size they would be easier to irrigate.

"This soil, being virgin, will be productive, but the ashes will prove a mighty good fertilizer," said Jasper, as they worked. "Course, this side of the section doesn't need irrigating now, probably won't for several years. So we'll just work up enough fields for you to plant some alfalfa, some wheat, and some corn, and then we'll fix the land on the other side. It will be interesting to see which side grows faster — this



one with natural moisture and fertilized by the ashes, or the other irrigated but without fertilizer."

Toward the middle of the forenoon the boys were surprised to see Joy and their sisters, bags hanging from their shoulders, appear on the field.

"What have you brought, something to eat?" called Phil.

"No. Seed," answered Margie.

"But we are not going to plant until we have all the fields ready," declared Ted.

"We are, though. Joy said it would help, and we want to do it," returned Margie.

"You'll be like Phil, sow enough for an acre in less than a quarter."

"You just wait and see, Mr. Smarty. Joy is going to show us, and she knows more about planting than you do, I guess."

Amused and pleased to think their sisters were really willing and eager to help, the young homesteaders watched them scatter the seed and then returned to their own task.

So well did the girls work that when night came four fields were planted and the seeds harrowed in.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### CHESTER BRINGS NEWS

**W**HEN the boys called their sisters the next morning, they were answered by groans and the information that the girls were too sore and stiff from their unusual work of the day before to get up.

“You are fine specimens to help carry on a farm,” commented Phil.

“Tell them breakfast is ready,” announced Ted. “They’d get up to eat when they wouldn’t get up to go to a party.”

“Bring breakfast in to us,” pleaded Margie.

“Waiter, serve the ladies’ breakfast in the rooms,” mocked Phil.

“Now don’t try to be funny, Phil,” called Margie. “I guess tramping over rough ground and sowing seed is harder than pitching a baseball, but I remember a boy in Weston who always lay in bed the morning after he had pitched and insisted on having his little sisters bring his food to him, although they had all the housework to do before going to sc—”

"All right, I'll bring it," broke in the elder boy, starting to pick up some plates. But a wink from Ted caused him to pause in his preparations.

Mindful of the manner in which Andy had cured his aches and pains, the boy seized the coffee-pot and darted into the bough house.

"Here's your coffee," he said. "Open your mouths." And without waiting for compliance with his command, he poured a generous supply of the hot liquid over each of his sisters.

All thought of soreness and stiffness forgotten, the girls leaped up, but Ted had wisely vanished as suddenly as he had entered.

In an amazingly short time and while Jasper and Joy were still laughing at Ted's joke, Sallie and Margie, fully dressed, dashed from the door, seized some hoes, and rushed for their brothers.

"Some cure for aches, what?" grinned the younger boy, as he dodged a blow. "I think I'll call myself Dr. Porter and advertise."

The girls, however, were bent on vengeance, and chased their brothers until their mother called:

"If you girls feel strong enough to run, you can help me shake out these blankets."

"We are farmers, not housemaids, Mrs. Porter," returned Margie, without abandoning the pursuit.

"But breakfast is getting cold and my 'flap-jacks' will be spoiled," interposed Joy.

At the words Phil stopped running. "I'll give you each two whacks at me, if you'll let me eat," he announced.

"So'll I," agreed his brother.

"Um, if Joy's flap-jacks are so good you are willing to be beaten, I think I'll eat them myself," decided Margie. "We'll punish you by allowing you only one apiece. Come on, Sallie and Momsy. Joy, you sit down. I'll serve the flap-jacks."

Not until Ted had told his sisters that he and Phil had been subjected to the same "cure" were the girls appeased, but Joy was compelled to fry more flap-jacks, so ravenously did the Easterners eat them.

"I'm going to live wherever you do, Joy," declared Margie, helping herself to more.

"You'll have another sort of ache, if you don't quit eating soon," chuckled Ted. "We're going to irrigate this afternoon and we'll need your help."

Leaving the girls to wash the dishes, the young



homesteaders set out with Mr. Jay and their horses to prepare the dry land. Mindful of all they had learned the day before, the boys were able to work much more rapidly, and when the girls came to call them for dinner, four fields were ready for irrigation.

After dinner Ted took his sisters and Joy to the farm ditch and instructed them about placing the canvas dams so as to throw the water into the laterals and onto the four fields.

"But we'll get our skirts sopping," protested Sallie, as they walked to the dam.

"Why can't we put on some of the boys' overalls?" asked Margie. "It would be a lark and there won't be anybody to see us."

Accordingly it was decided that they should don the apparel. Quickly they returned to the hut to do so, and while they were busy at the task, Ted took out the table Steve had given him and calculated the length of time it would take to irrigate the four fields.

"Why, we can do it all in half a day," he declared, after having covered several pieces of paper with figures. "Our stream is 37 miner's inches. With that we can get the required 2.3 acre-inches onto a field in a little more than three hours. But we have so much water in the reser-

voir that we can turn on 74 miner's inches, which will reduce the time to an hour and a half, only six hours for the four fields."

"We can do it sooner than that," returned his brother. "We have head enough so that we can irrigate all four fields at once. Anyhow, we'll try it."

"What's a 'head' of water?" demanded Margie. "I've heard of blockheads, but never of a water —"

"It means the depth of water in the dam, silly," interrupted Ted. "Now just get over your nonsense. This is serious work and it is important the irrigation should be successful."

"I stand rebuked, *Professor Porter*," mocked the girl. "Come on."

When they were ready, Mrs. Porter insisted upon accompanying them. Phil went to the head gate at the dam, Ted took his station at the first lateral, Margie and Sallie at the second, and Joy and her father with the girls.

"Ready?" shouted Phil.

"Ready," answered his brother, who, after making sure that the boxes leading from the laterals into the fields were unobstructed, ran to where his sisters were to help them with the canvas dam.

With a rapidity that surprised them the water came down the main ditch and in such force that it swept the canvas dam aside.

"Quick, you girls, take hold, one on each side," commanded Ted. And taking a shovel, he hurriedly threw in dirt at the back of the canvas until he had built a temporary dam which held the canvas in place.

"It's going into the field splendidly," said a voice close beside the young people.

Looking up, in surprise, the girls blushed furiously as they beheld Andy.

"Oh dear! I didn't think any one would see us," cried Sallie, dropping to the ground in confusion.

"Most sensible thing you could have done," commented Andy, in such a matter-of-fact tone that the girls' embarrassment vanished, and in a few minutes they were walking along the contour with him, watching the water spread over the fields, as unconcerned as though they were in their regular skirts.

So evenly that it amazed the young homesteaders did the water flow onto the prepared ground, the borders holding it with very little seepage.

"It's two and a half inches deep," Ted an-

nounced, after thrusting a foot rule into the pond which covered one of the fields.

“Better give it another inch, it won’t do any harm,” advised Andy, and when the desired depth had been obtained, Phil hastened back to close the head gate.

When this had been shut, the others closed the first lateral, and arranged the canvas dams to turn the water into the second field, repeating the operation with the two remaining fields.

“Isn’t Andy a perfect dear?” exclaimed Sallie, when she and Margie were back at the cabin, changing into the ordinary clothes. “There are not many men who would have been as nice about seeing us in those overalls.”

“*He’s* got plenty of sense,” commented her sister. “But he isn’t a bit nicer than Chester would have been.”

“So that’s the way the wind is blowing, eh?” laughed the elder girl. Then chancing to look out the window, she said: “Speaking of angels, here your lookout is.”

Rapidly they dressed and joined the boys and their two friends.

“I’m the answer book,” smiled Chester, as he greeted the girls. “I’ve found out a lot of things which will clear up several points. Mr. Jackson



and I have been questioning Petersen again. He laid the setting of the fire to two of his men who, he declared, in order to vent their spite on him, had set fire to the sawdust pile and then disappeared. Of course, we didn't believe him. Something he said, however, gave me an idea, and I located the men he accused, fellows known as Shorty and Tot. By pretending to know more than I did, and telling them that Petersen had laid the blame for the fire at their door, they told me he had hired them to set the pile afire and when they had done it, refused to pay them, declaring that he would have them arrested for arson. He promised them a hundred dollars."

"Why, that's just the amount stolen from us," exclaimed Phil.

"So I remembered," smiled Chester. "To make a long story short, I learned from the fellows that Petersen had been in Bradley when you outfitted and that one night later he announced he must go to Waterville to protect himself against some claim-jumpers."

"So it was Petersen who posted that warning. I had fancied Simmons was mixed up in it," commented Andy.

"We shall know more after Mr. Jackson has Petersen in jail; he has gone to arrest him now.

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We expect to recover the money of which you were robbed."

When the excitement over this information had subsided, Andy said:

"While we are in the explanation business, I might as well say that I have discovered why that telegram was delayed. As I was over here when it was first sent over the wire, of course I could not receive it. The operators tried to raise me on the succeeding days, and not being able to, when it came Friday, they sent it to the agent at Hutchins, with instructions to telephone it to some one who would deliver it. Naturally he sent it to Peleg."

"'All's well that ends well,' " laughed Mrs. Porter.

"And now it's my turn. I don't understand how a pile of sawdust could burn on a wet day," said Margie.

"It's like this," began both Andy and Chester, almost in the same breath. Whereat the others laughed, and the agent nodded to the lookout to proceed.

"Water acts on sawdust much as it does on coal: instead of putting out the fire, it makes it hotter."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### WORD FROM WASHINGTON

“**I** SUPPOSE it isn’t polite, but why did you and Chester happen over today, Andy?” asked Ted, as they sat about the campfire after supper.

“Can’t neighbours call without giving their reasons, in the East?” returned the agent quietly, while Chester blushed deeply.

“Of course they can,” declared Sallie. “You mustn’t mind Ted. He is irrepressible.”

“You mean irresponsible,” corrected Margie.

“Well, you weren’t over here every few hours when we were alone,” protested the boy, impishly.

“Which proves their good sense,” retorted Margie. “Why should two *men* come to see two callow kids play farmers?”

“Oh, I understand,” grinned the boy. “Come on, Phil, we’ll leave the *men* with the young ladies.” But as Ted looked toward his brother, he saw him walking away with Joy, and, with

a forced cough, he exclaimed: "Mr. Jay, won't you and Mrs. Porter come into the house where we can discuss our plans uninterrupted by these children's chatter?"

"But it was to discuss plans that Chester and I came," declared Andy, when the laughter and rebukes of the girls had subsided. "We want to know if day after tomorrow is too soon for the house-raising."

The exclamations of delight from the girls were rudely interrupted by Ted.

"It is," he announced emphatically.

As the boy had been most keen for the fun when the idea had been first proposed, the others looked at him in amazement.

"Why is it too soon, Ted?" demanded Margie. "We can cook enough food tomorrow."

"You mean Joy can," corrected her brother. "It took you two hours to make and bake a cake the other day, and then you couldn't eat it. But *I'm* not always thinking about food. We promised to help Jasper after we had finished our planting and there will be no house-raising until we —"

"Land sakes, if that's all to hinder, don't you young folks put off your fun another day. I can wait," interrupted the aged farmer.



“That’s just sweet of you, Mr. Jay,” exclaimed the younger girl. “I’m crazy for a dance.”

“You’re crazy, all right,” returned her brother, disgustedly. “Aren’t you ashamed, after all Jasper and Joy have done for us, to put off helping them until you can have a dance? Two or three days will make a lot of difference to his crops.”

“So that’s the trouble, is it?” asked Chester. “Well, you can rest easy, then. I rode over Jasper’s section today, on my way to Petersen’s, and it won’t be necessary to do any replanting. His fields are all up. The fire didn’t injure them.”

“Of course it didn’t, fire don’t burn cleared ground that’s been plowed,” said Mr. Jay. “I’d have told you that, only I supposed you knew it.”

“There, Mr. Smarty, that should teach you to be sure of your facts before you talk,” taunted Margie. “And honestly, Mr. Chester, my second cake was dandy.”

“I am sure of it,” smiled the fire lookout, while the others laughed. “Then there is no objection to passing the word for day after tomorrow?”

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“ I think not,” said Mrs. Porter, to whom they all turned.

“ All right. Don’t kill yourself cooking, Miss Margie. Good-night, all. I must get back to Bear Mountain.”

“ And I to Chikau,” announced Andy.

Throughout the following day all hands gave their attention to preparing food for the house-raisers, the boys and Jasper supplying wood and water while the women cooked, and toothsome indeed did the pies, cakes, cookies, and doughnuts look, arranged on a quickly improvised table.

Anxiously the homesteaders surveyed the sky when they arose, and great was their delight to see the day break clear.

“ It’s a good omen,” declared Jasper. “ Wonder who will be the first one here? ”

“ Can you guess? ” grinned Ted, coming up with two brimming pails of milk.

“ Oh, let’s all guess,” proposed Sallie.

“ You don’t have to,” returned her brother. “ Just look! ” And he pointed toward the brook up which Andy and Chester were riding.

Scarcely had they arrived, however, before others came, some on foot, some horseback, and some in schooners with their wives and children.

Not one of the bachelors but brought some present, varying from baskets woven from scented grass to stuffed birds and furs for rugs and blankets.

“If we only had a couple more sisters, we wouldn’t be obliged to do a stroke of work, Phil,” laughed his brother.

But the men did not linger long at the camp. Taking their axes and saws, they went into the woods, and soon the air rang with the sounds of chopping and orders.

Making themselves perfectly at home, the women helped get the dinner, and merry was the midday meal.

When Andy announced that some of the men would remain at camp to prepare the foundations for the cabin, there was more jollification, for all demanded the privilege.

“Why not draw lots?” suggested Margie.

Instantly there was a protest of “noes,” while others agreed. And the matter of selection was as difficult of solution as before until Ted, with Solomon-like wisdom, suggested:

“As we must have the foundations, why not let the married men fix them?”

Shouts of laughter and more protests greeted the idea, but it was finally adopted, the bachelors

taking the horses to the woods to haul in the logs.

With so many to help, the ground was soon leveled, the ground timbers placed, and nighttime found the floor laid.

“Now for the dance,” said Chester, when supper had been cleared away and the dishes washed.

“Who’s going to play?” asked Phil, in dismay. “I’ve heard of songs without words, but never of a dance without music.”

“Oh, I’ll whistle,” declared Ted.

But several of the men moved away, quickly returning with fiddles and accordions.

“Better take turns,” said Phil, wondering what the concert of instruments would sound like.

“Guess you never heard our Chikau band,” laughed Andy. “Just give them a sample, boys.” To the surprise of the newcomers, the men struck into a waltz which they played with perfect rhythm. And before they had finished, the young people were dancing.

Picturesque was the scene when the moon rose, flooding the vale with its silver, while the occasional howl of some beast of prey in the distance recalled the merrymakers to their isolation in the wilderness.



The floor being hard for waltzing, most of the dances were the old-fashioned "country dances," the men dancing together to fill out the sets, while the girls often changed partners several times during a figure, that none might be slighted.

"Eleven o'clock! Dance over!" announced Andy, and when they begged for a few more sets, he reminded them that the morrow would be a long hard day.

Again the weather was pleasant, and the working of mortising the uprights, ridge-pole, and rafters proceeded rapidly.

Just before dinner there sounded the clatter of hoofs, and two men rode up.

"Bill Simmons!" exclaimed Chester.

"What's going on here?" demanded the land agent, for he it was.

"House-raising. Can't you see?" retorted Andy, while the others gathered about the two interlopers.

"Whose house?"

"The Porters'."

"Well, you can save yourselves the trouble. Where's those Porter boys?"

"Here," chorused the young homesteaders, stepping toward the agent.

“ I’ve heard from Washington,” Simmons announced. “ As I told you, at my office, I thought would be the case, the government has refused your entry. Therefore you are trespassers on E 1, and if you are not off the section in six hours, I shall proceed — ”

Angry protests interrupted the agent, while Andy demanded:

“ Where’s the letter denying the entry? ”

“ Isn’t my word, the word of the land agent in Waterville, enough? ”

“ No.”

“ You bet it isn’t! ” exclaimed several voices.

“ Well, it’s all you’ll get. I expected to meet opposition, so I came prepared. Deputy, I order you to arrest Phil and Ted Porter for trespass, and Andy Howe for interfering with a United States officer in the per— ”

“ Buncombe! There’s no such law! ” declared Andy. “ I’ll give you five minutes to get off E 1, Simmons, or — ”

“ We will arrest *you* for trespass,” exclaimed a stern voice.

Turning, the men and women who had been engrossed in the controversy between the station agent and the land officer, beheld two more men.

“ Si Hopkins!” cried several voices, while others added:

“ You come just in time, Si!”

“ I’m glad,” returned the wealthy wheat-man. “ When I learned, upon my arrival in Water-ville, where Simmons had gone, I hurried as fast as I could.”

“ Deputy, arrest Silas Hopkins!” roared the land agent.

But the man, realizing the millionaire’s presence had some important meaning, made no move.

“ Now see here, Simmons, just keep quiet, or I’ll have you arrested,” advised Mr. Hopkins; then turning to Andy, he asked: “ Where is Mrs. Porter?”

“ I am Mrs. Porter,” replied the little woman, stepping forward with a quiet dignity, though she knew not what was in store for her.

“ I am delighted to meet you,” smiled the wheat-man, shaking her hand, “ and I am more sorry than I can express that you should have been subjected to such treatment. But the West is no different from other sections of the country, we have rascals here as well as elsewhere. I — ”

“ Deputy, will you — ” began the land agent, purple with fury.

"No, he won't, Simmons," snapped Mr. Hopkins. "Pardon me, Mrs. Porter, while I deal with this fellow and put an end to his interruptions."

"Simmons, you no longer have any power. Here is the order removing you from office," and he handed the astonished man a much be-sealed document, "and here is your appointment as land agent for the district of Waterville, Andy," he smiled, extending another document to the station agent.

For a moment there was silence, while the men and women drank in the meaning of the words, then came a roar of shouts and exclamations of approval.

"W-why didn't this come by mail, in the usual way?" demanded Simmons, during a lull.

"Because the Secretary of the Interior wished to be sure you received it. You know several documents sent by mail were never received by you, so you claim," answered Mr. Hopkins, significantly.

"I won't surrender my seal and papers to Howe," stormed the deposed agent.

"I am sorry further to abuse your hospitality, Mrs. Porter, but I must order the marshal to take charge of Simmons. When you change



your mind, Simmons, the marshal will bring you to Waterville. Take him to Bradley, Johnson."

"I won't go! You have no warrant. You can't —"

"Read the warrant, Johnson," snapped the millionaire.

Producing a paper, the marshal read the document, which contained charges of misappropriating government funds, of conniving at frauds in connection with homestead entries, and the wilful destruction of orders from the Secretary of the Interior.

"And some folks say there's no such thing as justice," exclaimed Jasper, in the silence which followed the marshal's reading.

"Take him away, Johnson," commanded Mr. Hopkins.

And as the two moved off, Andy said:

"It will be my pleasure, Mrs. Porter, as my first official act, to enter your claim on E 1. Now that you are here, you can file the entry yourself, which will save any necessity of special permission because Phil and Ted are not of age."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE HOUSE-RAISING

“IF we don’t start to work again, the cabin won’t be finished today,” declared Chester, after the men, dividing into groups, had discussed the downfall of the land agent for some time.

“Right you are,” agreed Andy. “Come on, fellows!” But though the men returned to their several tasks, they continued to talk about the recent events they had witnessed.

Surrounded by the Porters, Mr. Hopkins led the way to the bough house.

“I hope the strenuous reception hasn’t upset you, ma’am,” he said, turning to the frail little mother. “My wife has been very much worried about you. You seem to be looking pretty well, though.”

“And I am,” smiled Mrs. Porter.

“All the excitement has really done Momsy good,” declared Margie. “There has been so much going on that she hasn’t had time to get lonesome for her friends back in Weston.”

“As if I could ever be lonesome when I am with my children,” protested the mother.

“That’s what I told Mirandy. You certainly have a family of which to be proud. I like what Andy has told me about the way the boys and the young ladies have taken hold.”

“Oh, we shall be all right provided our crops come out well,” said Phil. “I wish, though, that we could have planted ten days ago.”

“It would have been better, of course, in view of the fact that you are not experienced farmers. Nevertheless, by following the most approved and scientific methods, you will be able to force your crops. By that, I mean frequent irrigation and cultivation. You have one advantage over your neighbours who have migrated from farms in other regions. They are unwilling, or seem so, to realize that the soil out here, being drier than that to which they have been accustomed, requires a different treatment. On the other hand, you, having no experience and no prejudices, ought to be wise enough to realize that the government experts seek only to aid our homesteaders and to follow the recommendations for planting and cultivation they make, as a result of the most exhaustive experiments. Nine out of ten of the settlers, however, can see in their

work only what they term 'new-fangled theories.' Bear in mind that you must rotate your crops. Follow corn with potatoes, potatoes with beans, alfalfa with corn. By doing so, you will conserve the phosphates and nitrates in the soil, whereas if you plant the same ground to the same crop season after season, you will soon exhaust them."

"What should follow wheat?" asked Ted.

"That is difficult to say. I have heard some good farmers advocate potatoes and others beans. I, however, believe it is best to let the land lie fallow for a season, being careful to keep the top crust pulverized, and then to sow corn or alfalfa."

"As you are the biggest wheat-grower west of the Rockies, I think we will follow your plan," declared Phil.

Smiling at this praise, Mr. Hopkins said:

"If I were you, I should send samples of the soil from your different fields to the experiment station at Boscow, telling them what you have planted on each and asking their advice as to the best crop to sow next year."

"We will surely do that," assented the boys, while Ted added:

"We will do it in a few days. It will be



interesting to learn the opinion of the experts as to the seed we have already planted in the various soils.”

As the young homesteaders spoke, Mr. Hopkins smiled delightedly, turning to Mrs. Porter.

“There you see, ma’am, the advantage it gives men to be able to understand the benefits of scientific farming. Your boys have the ability to realize the value of expert study of soils. If they take the advice of the men at the experiment station, they will soon have a farm that will not only support you comfortably but will make money for you.”

“I say, aren’t you people coming out to see the raising?” asked Andy, putting his head inside the door. “We are all ready, and the fellows will be disappointed if you don’t.”

Quickly the Porters and the rich wheat-grower arose, and followed the new land agent.

When they reached the floor, they beheld the men divided into groups, each about logs that were to serve as uprights, ridge-pole, and cross-beams and rafters.

“Ready?” asked Andy, rejoining them.

“Ready,” answered the different groups.

“Then up with your timbers.”

With an ease which seemed remarkable con-

sidering the size and length of the logs they handled, some of the men raised the uprights and dropped them into their mortises; this done, others swarmed up them and fitted the cross-beams that were lifted to them into place, after which still others carried the ridge-pole aloft, and when it had been set, the remaining groups quickly fitted the rafters. And as the last one slipped into place, men and women cheered.

"Many hands certainly do make light work," said Mr. Hopkins, as the Easterners voiced their amazement at the ease and rapidity with which the frame had been erected.

The work of fitting the roof and side logs was speedily accomplished, and after dinner, while the men chatted and rested, the women did their part in arranging the inside.

"Oh, we must have another dance," declared Margie, when the house-raisers were preparing to go to their several homes. The suggestion met with instant approval, and though some of those with families left before dark, it was late in the evening before the last of the helpers departed.

The next day Jasper announced his intention of returning to his farm, but the Porters would not hear of it.

"You and Joy can live in the bough house, and we can go over to your farm from here," declared Phil.

"Besides, your grass was all burned and your cattle would have poor grazing, while they can have a fine range on our west side," added Ted.

It was Joy, however, who finally decided the question by declaring she would feel lonesome at leaving the only young friends she had ever had, and her father humoured her.

For several days the boys assisted the aged farmer in clearing up the ruins of his home, and then busied themselves building shelters for their livestock.

Each day the girls inspected the fields, and one afternoon, as the boys returned from a trip to Bradley for provisions, Margie greeted them with the cry:

"The crops are up! The crops are up! Every field is covered!"

So excited were Phil and Ted at the announcement that they could hardly wait to unharness the blacks and feed them before they ran to see the green shoots for themselves.

"Let's take samples of each field this very day," enthused Ted, and pressing their sisters and Joy into service, they took clouts of soil

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from the different sections, using aprons, dress-skirts, and handkerchiefs to carry them.

In the evening they wrapped each sample in paper, writing the name of the seed sown carefully on the outside.

“I’ll take them over to Chikau tomorrow,” declared the younger boy. “It’s my day to give Jennie a lesson.”

“If it weren’t for Peleg, I should like to have the poor little thing with us,” said Sallie. “I’ll never forget how she fondled and looked at my clothes when I unpacked them.”

“Well, why can’t she come?”

“Peleg would have to work if she did,” returned Margie.

“Which would be jolly good for him. Can I ask her, Mommy? I will arrange with Steve to make Peleg stay at home.”

Readily Mrs. Porter gave her consent, for her kindly heart had gone out to the poor little cripple, so lonely and forlorn. Indeed, she had even thought of suggesting that Jennie be asked to visit them, yet had hesitated in fear that her daughters might not share her views.

Accordingly Ted stopped at the lumber-camp the next day, and, accompanied by Steve, rode to the store and extended his mother’s invitation.



But had it not been for the foreman, Peleg would have refused to part with his daughter. As it was, he upbraided her as graceless for leaving him when he was so helpless with rheumatism, and carried on to such an extent that it required the threat of the loss of the position as storekeeper before he finally consented.

To Jennie the prospect of visiting the Porters seemed like a trip to fairyland, and they all enjoyed her delight at being with them.

Closely Phil and Ted watched their fields, noting each day's growth.

"I think we ought to irrigate again," said the latter, one morning.

"I don't. The stuff is growing well," returned his brother.

"Has been growing well, you mean," corrected Ted. "For the last two days the plants have been at a standstill. Mr. Hopkins said we could force the crops, and irrigating is what will do it."

"Irrigating and cultivation," added Margie, for the girls had accompanied their brothers.

"But we can't cultivate wheat and alfalfa while they are growing," answered Phil.

"Oh, yes, you can," announced Joy. "It is ticklish work and slow, but the growth is so short

that by using hay-rakes you can break up the crust without injuring the plants."

"Let's ask Mr. Jasper," suggested Sallie.

"We will not," said Ted, emphatically. "We can never succeed if we always depend on some one else. It's for us to decide. What do you say, Phil?"

"That Joy knows more about farming than we do, so if she —"

"All right," interrupted his brother, with a grin. "Get into your overalls, ladies. It will be some job to rake all these fields, mark my words."

The eagerness to make their crops grow rapidly, however, caused the young people to make light of the work, and for the next three days they were at it early and late, breaking the surface crust. When this had been done, they irrigated the broken sections, and the result amazed them. The plants seemed to jump upward.

"If we irrigate once a week, we'll beat out our neighbours, after all," said Phil, enthusiastically.

"Then we'll do it," declared his brother. "I've heard a lot of people say we wouldn't have any crops to harvest, and I'll work twenty-four hours a day to show them we can do more by scientific methods, as Mr. Hopkins said, than they can in their way."

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### A FORTUNATE DISCOVERY

THE ease with which Margie and Sallie adapted themselves to the hard and often rough tasks of homestead life surprised their neighbours who had beheld their stylish clothes and hands that very evidently were unaccustomed to labour, with many a shaking of the head. And when they found that the girls were really natural and unaffected, the sturdy settlers took them to their hearts.

Rare was the day that some of the neighbours were not calling upon or receiving visits from Mrs. Porter and her daughters, for the boys had insisted upon their learning to ride the ponies that Mr. Hopkins had loaned.

In spare moments the young people practised with their firearms until they all became good shots, even the little mother overcoming her aversion enough to learn to fire both a rifle and a revolver with fair marksmanship.

As the season advanced, the young homesteaders irrigated their fields every week, with

the result that their crops grew splendidly. But as Phil and Ted watched them mature with pride, their neighbours watched them with jealousy.

Of this feeling, Chester was the first to learn, and when he did, he lost no time in seeking out Andy.

“Simmons is at the bottom of this,” declared the new land agent, when the fire lookout had imparted the unpleasant information.

“It certainly sounds like his work, but he has appealed to the settlers’ pockets, and that means trouble,” returned Chester. “Aren’t the boys’ crops far enough along so that they can give up irrigating them without injury?”

“Perhaps — I haven’t been over for a couple of days. But it makes my blood boil to think that these other homesteaders, who have had plenty of opportunity in years past to build irrigating plants and never did so, should start trouble now that Phil and Ted are taking advantage of the water supply.”

“That’s just it, Andy. So long as none of the others irrigated, no one thought about it. But now that two boys, without experience, take up a claim and, by irrigating, produce crops far and away ahead of any in the region, the others



realize their mistake. It isn't fair, but it's true. You, as land agent, are the only person who can handle the situation, *and you've got to hurry!*"

As though to emphasize the fire lookout's words, two horsemen drew rein in front of the Land Office, dismounted, and entered.

From their faces Andy and Chester realized they were in no pleasant mood.

"'Lo, Hall. 'Lo, Perkins," greeted the land agent, affably. "Haven't seen you for a long time. Sit down and have a cigar. Oh, you needn't be afraid of them," he added, as neither man took one from the proffered box; "they are some Si Hopkins sent me."

"We ain't come to chin, we come on business," grunted Hall, still refusing to accept a cigar.

With a snap Andy closed the cigar box, and replaced it in a drawer of his desk, while the newcomers glowered in silence.

"Why don't you get to it?" he demanded, when several moments had passed without anything being said.

Quickly Hall and Perkins exchanged glances, then the latter snapped:

"We want our rights!"

"But I haven't got them," blandly replied Andy.

“ Now don’t get funny,” growled Hall. “ You know what we mean.”

“ Unfortunately, I don’t,” returned the land agent, quietly.

Irritated by Andy’s calmness, Hall fairly screamed:

“ Them kids has been stealing Perkins’ and my water. They got to stop irrigating, and they got to pay us for ruining our crops by stealing our water. They — ”

“ Simmons made a mistake there — ” began Andy, only to be interrupted by Perkins.

“ Simmons? Simmons? Who said anything about him? *We’re* talking about *our* water rights.”

“ Which you would never have thought of if Simmons had not put the idea into your heads. But, as I said, he has made a mistake. The Porter boys are entitled to a certain amount of water, and I know they have not used more than their share because I helped them build their irrigating plant, and I made the sluice of such size that if they irrigated twice a week they would not quite use up their lawful allowance. As it is, they have irrigated only once a week, so, you see, your water rights have not been infringed.”

“But they dammed the stream — they ain’t no right to do that,” stammered Perkins, much of his bravado gone.

“Oh, yes, they have, provided, of course, they do not check the natural flow of the brook except on the days when they are entitled to the water for irrigation purposes.”

“Come on, Jerry. I told you in the first place, Andy was in with ’em,” exclaimed Hall.

Reluctantly his companion obeyed, but as they reached the door, Perkins turned.

“This ain’t the last of the matter, not by a long shot. We want our water — and *we’re going to get it.*”

In silence the friends of the young homesteaders watched the two angry settlers mount and ride away.

“Looks like trouble for the Porters,” commented Chester. “Wish the women folks hadn’t come out so soon. What you going to do?”

“Ride over to E 1, and then ‘feel out’ the other settlers. It is evident Simmons has a hand in the business. If I can only get proof of that fact from some of the neighbours, I will soon put an end to this ‘water rights’ talk.”

The Porters were at supper when the land

agent and the fire lookout arrived and, quietly putting up their horses, they entered the house.

"Hello, folks. Want some mail?" he asked, and in response to the eager hails, he handed several letters to Mrs. Porter.

"Here's a letter for you, Phil, from Boscow: the rest are for the girls."

"Wonder what is going on in Weston," said Ted, but Sallie and Margie refused to open their letters until Phil read the report from the experiment station. It began:

We have read your letter and examined the specimens of soil with interest. If one of our experts had inspected your section and advised you as to what crops to plant, he could not have made a better selection.

If you do not make the mistake of being afraid to irrigate, we see no reason why you should not reap handsome crops. Be careful not to let a crust form while the plants are small. Never irrigate until you have broken the crust.

We should be glad if you would inform us of your yield per acre of wheat, corn, alfalfa, and potatoes.



When we have these data, we will advise you as to the best crops for rotation.

One of our farmers will call upon you before very long. If you ever have the opportunity, we should be pleased to have you visit our experiment station at Boscow.

Please do not hesitate to consult us upon any problems that trouble you — that is what we are for, to aid farmers to increase their yields and to advise them in their difficulties.

With best wishes for your success,

(Signed) ANDREW HARRIS,  
Supt. Government Experiment  
Station at Boscow.

“That letter lowers my opinion of the government’s experts,” scoffed Sallie. “They can’t tell luck in happening to put the right seed in the right kind of soil from real knowledge of conditions. I wonder they don’t ask you to accept positions as expert farmers on their stations.”

“It wasn’t all luck that Phil and Ted planted as and where they did,” returned Andy, surprised at the girl’s sarcasm. “Mr. Hopkins gave them a lot of points on the way out here — and they remembered them.”

“To say nothing of all you told and showed us,” added Phil.

“The more you know Sallie, the less attention you will pay to her opinions,” declared Ted. “Bet there’s something in one of her letters that has made her mad, and she’s taking it out on us. ‘Fess up, now, Sallie, isn’t it so?”

“It is. Nell and Tom say they are coming out to visit us.”

At the announcement the younger boy danced about in impish glee.

“I knew it. I knew it was something like that!” he chuckled.

“Write and say we can’t have them. Say we’re sick or starving — anything that will make them stay at home,” snapped Phil.

To Andy, Joy, and Jennie this outburst was incomprehensible, for it seemed to them that a visit from their friends in the East would be most welcome, and in her ingenuousness Jennie asked:

“Aren’t they nice people that you don’t want them?”

“They are nice, Jennie, very nice,” laughed Ted, who enjoyed the situation thoroughly. “That’s not the trouble. But I’ll tell —”

“Keep quiet,” growled Phil.

“Not much, I won’t. The trouble is, until they came out here, Phil thought Nell was the nicest girl in the world, and Sallie thought —”

“Momsy, won’t you make that imp hold his tongue?” demanded the girl.

But Ted, satisfied with the mischief he had wrought, as evidenced by the flushed faces of Joy and Andy, took to his heels, shouting back:

“Shall I go over to Chikau to telegraph Tom and Nell to come at once?”

Awkward, indeed, was the situation, and Mrs. Porter was wondering how she could best relieve it, when Margie cried:

“You needn’t worry about Tom and Nell. Beth says they are all going up to a camp in the Adirondacks and that they will postpone their visit to us until next year.”

“Thank goodness,” exclaimed Phil.

The embarrassment relieved by Margie’s information, Andy said:

“I have received word that your application for entry has been accepted, Mrs. Porter. Here is the paper which secures your claim. In due time the homestead will be granted to you.

“I have also seen Mr. Jackson. Petersen has made a full confession, which implicates Simmons in the effort to drive your sons from E 1.

He also has returned the money he stole from the camp, and here it is."

Gratefully the mother accepted it.

"But why did he confess to so much?" asked Margie. "Won't it make his sentence more severe?"

"That remains to be seen. We have long suspected he was but a tool in Simmons' schemes. Undoubtedly he reasoned that, by making a clean breast of it, he would prove a valuable witness against Simmons and thus perhaps escape punishment. In the morning I want to look over your crops. Chester tells me that they are ahead of any others about here. The settlers are all talking about them, and declaring that you are cutting off their water supply by so much irrigating. I may as well tell you that two complaints have been filed. While I believe they are prompted by jealousy, I desire to look over the ground myself. By learning conditions, I shall be able to prevent any serious trouble."

At Andy's words consternation seized the family, and the boys related in detail their method of breaking the crust and then irrigating once a week.

"Who is making the complaints, Andy?" asked Joy.



“ Oh, let’s forget about them — they don’t amount to anything.”

“ I was only wondering if it were Jerry Perkins and Lafe Hall.”

“ What makes you mention them? ”

“ Because I saw them riding to Bradley with Simmons yesterday.”

Glad were the land agent and fire lookout that it was twilight, and that the expressions on their faces at this information could not be seen.

“ Much obliged for telling me, Joy,” returned Andy, quietly. “ And now let’s think of something else. By the way, I’ve some good news that I almost forgot. Si wrote that he might be over this way any day now.”

“ Oh, I hope he comes before we begin to harvest. I want him to see our alfalfa standing,” exclaimed Ted.

The mention of the harvest brought up the question of method, and Mr. Jay offered the boys the use of his mowing-machine and reaper in return for their assistance in garnering his crops.

“ Why don’t you rent E 2 to Phil and Ted, Jasper? ” inquired Chester.

“ Mebbe I will — if they ask me to. They’d make a mighty purty farm, E 1 and 2 would.”

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This suggestion roused a train of possibilities that the young people discussed until Mrs. Porter declared they would never get up in the morning unless they retired at once. And with brains awirl with big thoughts, they exchanged "good-nights."

To Ted it seemed that he had only just closed his eyes when his shoulder was shaken and Margie's voice sounded in his ear.

"I saw two men at the head gate of our ditch," she breathed.

"You're dreaming," retorted her brother. "How could you see them when you were in bed?"

"But I wasn't. I got up for a drink of water. Something made me look out the window — and I saw them. I know I did. Shall we wake the others?"

"And have them laugh at us? Not much. We'll sneak up there ourselves. I'll make you go as punishment for setting me on such a chase at this time of night. But mind, not a word to any one. *I* don't want to be gayed, even if you do. Go dress and wait for me."

Stealthily the boy got into his clothes, then took his pistol and his rifle, and joined his sister, who also carried a rifle.

“Better leave that here. You’ll have an attack of nerves and fire it and wake everybody.”

Margie, however, refused to relinquish the weapon, and together they stole from the house.

The silence of the night, together with that indescribable effect bright moonlight produces upon trees and land, enhancing shadows and making startling forms and figures out of every bush and rock, awed the brother and sister.

Unconsciously they drew closer together, holding their rifles at the “ready,” the while they peered intently toward the head gate.

“Do you see that thing, there to the left of the gate? It’s moving,” gasped Margie, her teeth chattering so she could scarcely enunciate.

Though his heart seemed in his mouth, Ted stopped, raised his rifle to his shoulder, and sighted along the barrel. But even as he did so, he beheld a spurt of flame, then heard a report — and a bullet “pinged” over their heads.

Instantly Ted fired his rifle, then whispered hoarsely: “Drop to the ground. Crawl back to the house and get the boys. I’ll crawl to the head gate.”

The two reports, rending the stillness, waked Andy and Chester. With a bound they were out

of bed, dressed hurriedly, seized weapons, and ran out.

"Some one at the dam," called Ted. "Come on."

"Stay where you are. We'll pour in a few volleys," exclaimed Andy.

By this time the women had been aroused.

"Don't come out," ordered Chester. But, arming themselves, they insisted, and were made to lie down and shoot in the volleys with the others.

Three times responses came from the dam, then there were no more.

"They've taken to the woods. Let's follow," cried Ted.

"Which is just what they want," returned Andy. "We'll at least wait until daylight."

Never did time seem to go so slowly as to the anxious watchers, for none of them could be persuaded to return to bed. But at last dawn broke, and they cautiously advanced upon the dam.

Three axes, as many crowbars, and some dynamite lay about on the right side of the gate. But no harm had been done to it.

"You got that drink of water just in the nick of time, Margie," exclaimed Chester. "If it



hadn't been for you, E 1 would be minus an irrigation plant this morning."

"Let's trail them right now. Here's a bully track!" cried Phil.

Andy, however, insisted that they have breakfast first.

"But the fiends may get away with so long a start," protested Sallie.

"It is hardly necessary to try to track them," returned the land agent. "I've an idea who the three are."

When breakfast had been eaten, however, the young homesteaders insisted upon taking the trail.

In vain Andy and Chester sought to dissuade them, then, finding they could not, left Jasper to guard the womenfolk, and all four rode forth.

Going to the head gate, they picked up the trail and followed it toward E 2 for a mile. At the highway the miscreants separated, and their pursuers did likewise, Andy and Chester taking two of the tracks and the young homesteaders the other.

"We'll ride till ten o'clock," said the land agent. "If we don't find our men by then, we'll go back to the cabin. If we see them, the one so doing will fire three times in rapid succession."

But no sight of their quarry did any get, and at ten the boys turned homeward.

Their course had taken them beneath a cliff on the Jay farm. As they repassed it, Phil drew rein.

"Look at that dark streak in the rock, Ted. It looks like blood," he exclaimed.

Dismounting, both boys scrambled a few feet up the face of the cliff to the streak.

"It isn't blood, but it's queer," said Ted. "Here's a chunk I can get. It will make a good paper-weight." And after much prying and rapping with his hunting-knife, he succeeded in obtaining a piece of the curious-looking quartz as large as a hen's egg. "My, but it's heavy," he announced, as he put it in his pocket and then promptly forgot it.

At the cabin they found not only Andy and Chester and their family anxiously awaiting them, but Mr. Hopkins.

"Thank goodness, you are back safe," exclaimed Mrs. Porter. "I was so worried."

"It was a bit risky for you two boys," commented the wealthy wheat-grower. "The miscreants would probably have been more glad to hurt you than your dam."

"Don't baby them, Mr. Hopkins," exclaimed

Margie. "I don't believe they searched at all. Probably they hid until it was time to come back. *I* know *I* could have found something if —"

"Is that so, Miss Smarty? Well, we did find something; see?" flared Ted. And he drew the chunk of quartz from his pocket, displaying it mockingly.

Amused, the others gazed at the stone, then suddenly Andy exclaimed:

"Let me see it."

"Look out, it's heavy," laughed the boy, as he tossed it to the agent.

As he caught it, Andy hefted it, then examined it closely, scraping it with his knife.

"Where did you find it?" he asked, in evident excitement.

Catching his eagerness, the others closed in, asking, "What is it? What is it?"

"It's gold — that is, it's quartz-bearing gold."

"Gold. Oh my, and I thought it was blood," cried Phil, and quickly he told of the manner of the discovery.

"Pretty good work, I call it," said Mr. Hopkins. "You set out to find some 'bad men' and ran onto a gold mine."

"But it's on Joy's land," declared Phil.

"But you found it," returned the girl.

"H'm! Guess you'd better arrange a partnership, Jasper," smiled the millionaire. "Phil found it and Joy owns it."

"We'll leave that to the young people," chuckled the old settler. "But first let's all go see the vein."

Quickly the blacks were harnessed into the big wagon, hay, rugs, and pillows thrown in, and soon they were excitedly discussing the surprising and delightful discovery, as they jolted along.

It was impossible to drive to the spot, but when they reached the cliff Andy, after a hurried examination, declared that it was a real vein of gold.

"I knew there was gold in this country, but I didn't know where to look for it," commented the millionaire. And on their return he related numerous experiences he and his agents had had prospecting.

Arrived at the cabin, they found Petersen, who lost no time in declaring that Hall, Perkins, and Simmons were the ones who had tried to blow up the dam.

"Sure you weren't there too?" demanded Mr. Hopkins.



“ Yes, sir. I’m good now. I prove by catching Hall, Perkins, and Simmons, yes? ”

“ You certainly will, if you deliver them to the sheriff at Bradley,” declared Andy.

“ Good. I do it.” And he galloped away.

“ When can we begin mining? ” asked Ted.

“ After the harvest. The gold will keep, but your crops won’t,” smiled the millionaire.

“ Besides, we’ll need the harvest money to buy tools to work the mine,” interposed the ever practical Sallie.

“ As to that, I shall be glad to finance the company,” returned Mr. Hopkins. “ Jasper, now we’ve learned there really is gold there, how about that partnership? ”

“ I said we’d leave it to the young people, Si.”

Eagerly all eyes were turned upon Phil and Joy. Blushing furiously, the boy and girl looked at one another, then Phil said:

“ I think we can arrange it.”

THE END

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